A Reflective on Incidental Fishing

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A Reflective on Incidental Fishing

by SaitouLover

Summary

Will didn't think either of them meant for it to happen. He certainly hadn't.

But the simple fact still remained: he had slept with Hannibal Lecter.

And now he was pregnant.

Notes

I've gotten enough comments about this universe that I felt I needed to explain.

This is not A/B/O. Here, it's normal for men to be able to carry as well... just far less common. I'm thinking that for every 1000 female pregnancies there's one male pregnancy. Enough that it would turn some heads but not enough to be considered freakish. Heterosexual pregnancies are still the overwhelming majority because the majority of men who can carry are straight. It can take people by surprise because men don't have external menstruation like women.

Will grew up in a time and place where it wasn't openly acceptable, and so doctors and schools didn't screen for the ability. Things have changed since then but Will never felt the need to get himself checked.

Just suspend your sense of belief and go with it. You get a cute Graham-Lecter baby out of it.

Chapter 1

Will didn’t think either of them meant for it to happen. He certainly hadn’t.

They hadn't been particularly drunk that night, a few glasses of wine before and during dinner, a glass of the expensive whiskey that was kept as a compromise in the study after. Nothing out of the ordinary to indicate the impending change in their routine. But, despite the lack of notable proceedings, the simple fact still remained: he had slept with Hannibal Lecter.

And now he was pregnant.

Beverly had been running an office pool about when they would 'get down to the dirty', not thinking either genius was aware of the steadily growing pot. Will had been horrified and then grudgingly amused by the woman's antics, forcing himself to view his and Hannibal's interactions through his coworkers' eyes and not his own. He had brought it up during a session and Hannibal had shrugged it away as interesting but unimportant. The older man's nonchalance eased the doubt that lurked in the profiler and helped bridge the gap that lingered between them ever so slightly.

It hadn't occurred to either party to use protection. Their sleeping together had been a suddenly decided upon experiment, something to take note of and then move on from. It was not a drunken fumble nor was it a rushed and passionate coming together between two lovers. The movements were clinical but thorough, both participants reaching a satisfied completion that left them content in their wonderings. The agreement that once was enough, however, was clear in the unspoken affection that passed between them after. Neither man was the type to let their sexual urges take precedence over the usual iron-fisted control they each contentedly maintained.

Personally, Will wasn't that interested in sex, not when his mind was slowly loosing itself amidst the jagged remnants of the murderers Jack pressured him into becoming. And Hannibal, Will realized shortly into their first real meeting in his hotel room, was just as anal about the control he wielded about his person as Will was, even more so. The psychiatrist would sooner lose an appendage than his composure.

So neither man had considered condoms, both knowing the other was clean. Which led to the current predicament Will found himself in. The signs were all there, dulled – thank god – but still present and accounted for in a way that could add up to only one conclusion.

He was going to have Hannibal’s baby.

The Chesapeake Ripper’s baby.

Will felt his stomach clench at that last thought but ignored it, unwilling to show any weakness to the cameras – and Chilton – that would signal something was wrong. There was no way he could allow the prison psychiatrist to learn of his condition. A criminally-insane empath was one thing, but a pregnant criminally-insane empath was a completely different

matter. He rolled over on his bed, his back to the cell's open area, and faced the wall, his eyes closed in thought.

Will needed to escape the asylum before anyone found out about the baby. There was no telling what the administration would do if the pregnancy was discovered. Everyone believed him to be the Ripper, a sociopath-killer without any care but for himself. Someone would undoubtedly attempt to kill the baby, both as a means of punishing him and to spare the child the burden of having such a monster for a parent. He was also afraid of what would happen if Chilton realized, or if Hannibal was made aware.

That thought stopped Will cold and he gritted his teeth in frustration. Hannibal had set him up, used their friendship to destroy not only the surrogate daughter they shared but also one of the only stable supports his fragile mind had. The psychiatrist had done so much for, and to, Will that the empath could not tell what had been done to help Will, or to help Hannibal. But through all the confusion cut one frightfully clear fact.

Will had to get the hell out.

The sycophant orderly was a god-send.

While the empath found himself still trapped in the asylum, he was no longer trapped in his own mind, and with that freedom came a release from the majority of the crippling guilt he felt on a daily basis. There was a new clarity to Will's thinking, something calculating and verging on sociopathic.

Will was forced to acknowledge it when he sent Matthew after Hannibal without any true care to the younger man's well-being. The missing weight from his shoulders should have scared him, but the younger man was a killer, no matter how creepily-nice he was to Will. Will knew the prison orderly succeeding in his task wasn’t likely – Will knew Hannibal after all – but killing Hannibal hadn't been Will’s goal.

The older man betrayed Will, was the serial-killer Jack had been siccing him after, but, despite that, was still the best friend Will had ever had. Hannibal may have fed Will his victims, but he had invited the empath into his home in order to do so. The man listened to Will, made Will feel just a little bit normal. Memories as precious as those shouldn't be tainted by Hannibal's premeditated murder, no matter how inventive the kill.

Also. Killing Hannibal wouldn’t get Will the fuck out of prison.

No, Will needed to surprise Hannibal, remind the man that Will still existed and just why it was he had been so interested in the younger man in the first place. It was a dangerous balancing act Will was performing, too much and Hannibal would take too great an interest before Will was released from prison, too little and he wouldn't bother with freeing the empath from his confines.

As the four month mark passed and his belly began to swell, still too indistinct for anyone but Will to notice when clothed, his panic and sense of urgency began to grow along side the child housed in his body. Chilton continued his controversial 'therapy', blinding and deafening Will with strobe lights and noise, and Will spent hours after each session combing through his mind and picking apart the triggers and suggestions Chilton had tried implanting. It was horrible and maddening, and the murderous impulses he felt whenever near the prison psychiatrist were all his own.

Gideon was another stroke of luck that Will did not hesitate in taking advantage of. He quickly manipulated Chilton into going along with his plan, finding it incredibly easy to use his empathy to ensure the optimal outcome. It was more difficult getting Hannibal to play along, daring him from behind metal bars and stone barriers to prove Gideon wrong. Will managed somehow, most likely due to the twisted and insulting words spewed by Freddy's articles.

Hannibal did bite though, eventually, which was all Will cared about. He thanked every god he knew but didn't believe in the moment the administration announced he would be released. Due to bureaucracy and red tape, Will would be a free man first thing Monday morning, after a comprehensive evaluation to ensure the hospital hadn't fucked him up too badly. Monday was still two days away, so the remainder of the time was spent in his - still locked - cell, going over his escape plan for errors.

Monday morning, Chilton stood disapproving and disappointed in the background as Will called a cab and went through his belongings that the prison had confiscated. Will felt the other man's stare but couldn't find room in hisself for anything but profound relief. He noted the absence of a few smaller items and was vindictive enough to threaten a lawsuit for theft. They were located in quick order. He dawdled in the small office, chatting with an orderly until the front gate announced the arrival of his taxi.

Jack was standing in the main receiving room, waiting for Will with a pinched and guilty expression, his hands jammed into his trouser pockets. He was there to either take him home or guilt Will into forgiving him, both were likely. Will walked past him, ignoring the call of his name, and proceeded out the prison's front doors.

"Will! Will, stop!" Jack shouted from behind, quickly catching up with him. He grabbed Will's shoulder and jerked the shorter man to a stop.

"Please let go." Will forced his tone into something even, almost apathetic as he stared straight ahead.

Jack growled and squeezed the shoulder he was gripping, a blatant show of domination. Will didn't appreciate it. At all.

"We need to talk." Jack's voice was soft, like it usually was whenever he was deciding how far he could steamroll over Will's wants and needs. It brought Hannibal's descriptive image of a shattering teacup to mind.

"No," Will tossed over his shoulder firmly, no longer willing to get involved with the Ripper's crimes now that he didn't have to. "We don't."

"Will..." Jack started warningly.

"Let. Go."

Jack tugged on Will's shoulder and the younger man's mouth twisted angrily before he gave in and turned to face the agent. The time away from the FBI and the field allowed Will to recover and find his feet in the rolling sea of his empathy. He acknowledged that while he was Jack's best tool for catching the bad guys, it didn't mean Will was his only tool, nor should he be. Jack was simply looking for the easiest and most expedient method with no regard to how much damage he caused. He was very similar to Hannibal in that.

Will met Jack's gaze and knew, without a doubt, that while Jack cared for him, he'd always put Will last. Jack had sympathy, but it was for the dead, the victims. And if that was the case, Will had no desire to obtain it. Will had his baby to worry about. He knew Jack and Alana would be against him keeping it, but for completely different reasons.

A child would distract Will, keep him from the field and from Looking. It would lower the closure rate, and Jack's sole focus was closure. Also, if the older man realized that Hannibal was the Ripper, there was a distinct possibility that he'd be callous enough to try to use Will and the baby for his own means. Jack was vicious when hunting and he wouldn't hesitate to put the baby of a killer in harm's way.

Jack was preferable to Alana however. Alana would be kind and understanding, all the while being firmly against Will keeping the baby. It wouldn't matter how much the empath already loved the small thing growing inside his body or how ready and willing he was to accept it and change his entire life for it. Alana wouldn't take how Will had grown and calmed while in prison as a positive sign. No, she'd find out about the pregnancy and try to get him to give the child up because of his previous instability. And when that failed, and it would because the baby would have to be pried from Will's cold dead hands, she'd have authorities rip his happiness from him by force.

A sharp shake of his shoulder jarred him back into the moment and Will winced at the rudeness of it. The empath grimaced at the instinctive annoyance that belonged to both his ex-psychiatrist and himself. Instead of wasting energy on ordering Jack to let him go again, he glanced around for an escape. Guards were loitering inside the front doors to the prison, watching the confrontation warily, and Will maneuvered his body and posture until it appeared as if Jack was being overly-physical.

"Let go! Jack, you're hurting me!"

Jack's eyes widened in surprise and the guards jumped into action, rushing over to pull the FBI agent away from Will, hauling the protesting man back several feet. It was only expected that they'd be waiting to offer aide after spending the past four months tormenting an innocent man. Guilt, Will thought as he gripped the shoulder where Jack's hand had been, made a wonderful motivator. The empath made an expression of pain when Jack opened his mouth to protest.

"Stay away from me, Jack. You've done enough."

He turned and hurried towards the waiting taxi cab and driver.

"Will! Wait! I didn't mean for any of this to happen. Stop! Will!"

Will ignored the frantic calls and climbed into the car, refusing to look back as the taxi turned onto the main drive of the asylum and left the man he had considered a friend behind.

It seemed that he had beaten the reporters to Wolf Trap, a small miracle onto itself, but he checked every inch of his property for the tell-tale flash of red hair just to be sure. His land was absent of any of the piranhas, so he was left by himself to sort out the mess of his house in a livid silence. The agents searching his home hadn't cared at all, breaking and ripping his furniture apart. His books were torn from the shelves and some even had pages ripped out of them. He was amazed that the Bureau hadn't seized his property like they had with Hobbs.

Everywhere Will Graham turned was a constant reminder of what he had allowed his life to become, and of what he had lost because of Hannibal and the FBI.

The empty dog-beds were proof enough of that.

Will felt rage bubble under his skin, festering and burning his composure away the deeper he traveled into his home. Eventually he ended up at his kitchen table and pulled out his cellphone - still working, so someone had kept up on the payments for him - dialing one of the two unfamiliar numbers that he had jotted down before leaving the prison.

"Purnell." The voice was stiff and formal, the command obvious in the only word that was said.

"I want a settlement today, end of business day tomorrow at latest, or I'm going to drag you and every person there through the mud and take everything the FBI is worth."

The woman was quiet for several long moments before clearing her throat. Will heard papers shuffle in the background as she spoke in a falsely-calm voice.

"I take it this is your way of resigning?"

"I'm not taking anything less than ten million in one lump sum payment, covered under a tax-sheltered annuity with a maximum five percent tax rate. You try to screw me over and Freddy Lounds will hear all about it."

"Are you blackmailing the FBI, Mr. Graham?" Her voice was chilly with censure.

"No." Will leaned back in his chair. "I'm simply telling you how it is. There's no way I can return to work, the field or the academy. Not only is my reputation ruined, but Jack has been

happy enough to run me into the ground, despite knowing how what I do effects me. I can't go back. I won't."

"So this is your resignation."

Will's mouth twisted as he tapped a finger against his swelling abdomen, still concealable by his flannel shirt. "You don't want me back and I don't want to go back. This is just me looking out after myself. I have to find a completely different profession because the FBI allowed a pushy and obsessed agent to manipulate and abuse me.

"Every higher-up knew I shouldn't have been allowed to work even one case the way Jack was making me, but not a single one of you stepped in to put your foot down. I was warned by several reliable sources that my time in the field was being watched closely, but nothing happened when it was clear to everyone that I was breaking down. I won't be able to function if I have to go back, it's not possible."

"You could have simply refused, Graham."

"Bullshit. We both know Jack has my number. The right words in the right tone has my empathy for the victims, for him, going into overdrive. He knew how to manipulate me so I couldn't say no. Don't get mad now, now that I've learned how to stand up for myself."

Purnell remained silent and Will got up to wander outside.

"The FBI ruined my life. My house is in shambles, it will be a miracle if I ever work in a respectable field again. All but one of my dogs were given away because people thought I was a monster." Will stepped out onto the wooden porch. "You want me gone? Well I'm happy to go if you give me the means to survive."

"Give us until Friday, our legal team will have to approve everything."

"Tomorrow, end of business," Will repeated, unwilling to compromise. "I want to be as far from here as possible by tomorrow night."

"Is there a reason for the rush?"

Will let his gaze drift to the edge of his drive, half-way expecting to see a familiar Bentley turning onto the gravel. "Reporters. It's only a matter of time before they come. I want a clean break, from everything. Money can help me disappear."

"You want to avoid Jack Crawford." She sounded sure of herself.

"Wouldn't you if you were me? I know I can't go back. I also know he'll do and say whatever he can to get me back into the Ripper investigation. The only true break is a completely clean one."

Purnell hummed once. "Where will you go?"

"West coast," he lied. "Hawaii sounds far enough, for now."

"I'll call you by noon tomorrow with an update. I'll make it clear that this is in the best interest for all involved."

Will grunted and hung up, pocketing the phone before reentering the house. He made his way upstairs and packed the only articles of clean clothing and the few personal effects he had left into the back of his car. It was just before three in the afternoon when he locked up the house and drove away, heading in the direction of Washington. He veered off before reaching the city limits and traveled south, ending up at a random hotel in Arlington.

He brought his few bags of belongings into the room and then traveled the rest of the way to D.C. where he sold his car for a sliver above salvage price and pocketed the thousand dollars the salesman reluctantly handed over. Will walked a few blocks before grabbing dinner at a nearby restaurant and called for a cab after ordering dessert.

The hotel was quiet as he made his way back to his room, the guests secured in their own accommodations, and Will felt lighter than he had in months. He finally saw what he could believe to be the way out from the hell he had been trapped in since Jack first appeared in his classroom, and it felt good. It felt better than good, knowing that in a few short days he'd be out from under Jack's thumb and, hopefully, far enough from Hannibal's scheming to regroup before reentering that particular fray.

While Will doubted Hannibal would give up on whatever it was he was planning, he hoped that his own actions would be enough to evade the man's web and reaching fingers. Will knew he didn't have the evidence needed to convict Hannibal. At the heart of the matter, even after everything the serial killer had done to him, Will wouldn't want to, even if he'd had the proof. Though he would never forget - or forgive - what the other had done to Abigail to ensure his own freedom.

Besides, Will had more than himself to think about now. Trying to apprehend Hannibal would only risk the fetus unnecessarily and Will was selfish enough to admit he cared far, far more about the baby than putting Hannibal behind bars. If Will couldn't have Abigail then he'd do his best to keep the baby Hannibal had unwittingly given him to replace her.

Will never thought having children was probable, or appropriate given his mental instability, but now that the encephalitis was cured Will really didn't have anything to fear. He wasn't insane, he couldn't pass the previously-suffered psychosis down to the next generation. It was perfectly safe for him to procreate.

And he did want children, always had. Growing up with his father, poor as they may have been, made him yearn to have someone of his own, to teach and protect and love like Nathan Graham had Will. Will decided early on that he'd only pass on the best bits from his own childhood, all the while making damned sure the baby would never feel the pains of abandonment or hunger that he had. It would grow up happy and healthy and, above all, with a healthy sense of self-preservation. Will's father had taught him what it meant to be a parent. Now Hannibal had given him the means to act on that teaching.

And Will could freely admit to himself that Hannibal was his preferred option for the other father. Even after taking the whole serial-killer, cannibal thing into consideration. In Will's opinion, it was better to have a single snake coiled in his den, no matter how deadly, than the

dozens that waited just outside the door. Will's snake ate its competitors, which was a helpful habit to have when the competition was drawn to Will like gnats to sugar.

One of his only regrets though was that Abigail couldn't be a part of Will's impending family. She would have been a wonderfully protective big sister.

After stripping out of his clothes and showering, he reclined against the headboard and plunked his beaten up laptop on his thighs and accessed the internet. Four months was a long time to be removed from the world and Will hated not knowing what had happened. He spent a couple hours catching up on world and national news before he pulled up Freddy Lounds' articles, scrolling through the numerous entries with a growing sense of incredulity as he read on. Will closed the computer with a disgruntled sigh and reclined on the queen-sized bed. He rested a hand on his belly, the palm cupping the tiny bulge that existed beneath his pajamas.

The reluctance he felt about broadcasting Hannibal's guilt to the world was not unexpected. Will knew that part of it was due to careful conditioning on Hannibal's account, but there was also a small portion of Will that still considered the older man a friend. Despite what he had done to Will, Hannibal had also helped him deal with the trauma of his empathy, even if he had been the one leading Will down that destructive path in the first place.

The thought made Will frown momentarily before he shrugged and turned the lights off, rolling over onto his side. The dark of the room swallowed him and Will heard the steady breathing of the stag from wherever it was in the room. The stag was the one vision that stubbornly remained after the treatment, a lasting memorial to the darkness Hannibal had unleashed inside him.

The harsh sound of his phone ringing startled Will awake. He glanced at the alarm clock, seeing it was only seven in the morning, and clumsily groped for the vibrating piece of plastic. Will checked the caller ID and groaned as Alana's number came up on the screen.

"Yes, Alana?"

He sounded tired even to himself, both from being woken and from having to deal with someone the day after getting out of prison. It must have startled Alana because she hesitated.

"How are you, Will?"

Will bit back the instinctive words that rose and sighed. "Jack told you to call, didn't he?"

"He's worried about you. We all are."

"I'm sure." Will couldn't help but scoff. "Jack's worried I'm too broken to help catch the Chesapeake Ripper."

"That's not true," Alana argued.

"Yes it is." Will stretched and stuffed his free hand behind his head. He stared up at the ceiling. "How's Winston?"

"I'm sorry, Will. I didn't know..." Alana trailed off, her voice breaking in pity and guilt.

Will scowled. "Didn't know what? That I'd be freed only to go home and find out all my dogs were missing?"

The female psychiatrist exhaled. "He's fine, Will. Winston is absolutely fine. I wouldn't let them-"

"But you thought it was okay to let them take Buster and the others?"

"Will..." Alana suddenly sounded close to tears.

He ignored her distress and sat up, swinging his legs off the mattress. "They were my family, Alana. Winston's the only one left, and that's only because you feel guilty about screwing my therapist."

Alana sucked in a harsh breath. "How...?"

Will chuckled, a mean sound. "I am literate, Alana. I read all about it on Tattle Crime yesterday."

"Will..."

"Just stop," Will sighed tiredly. "You're both adults. It's not my place to judge you for your relationships."

"Thank you," she murmured. "Will, I..."

"Don't. I don't want to hear it, Alana. I'll be by this evening to get Winston."

Alana hesitated. "I'm having dinner with Hannibal."

Will closed his eyes and exhaled in frustration. "I know where your spare key is. I can just slip in and get him."

"Maybe you should wait. You've just been through a massive shock."

"I'm getting my dog, Alana. Even if I have to wait at your apartment all night."

The woman remained silent for several beats and her voice was strained when she spoke next. "You could always come with me. I'm sure Hannibal will be happy to see you."

"Not tonight." Will remembered how Hannibal had scented the encephalitis on him, something far more subtle than pregnancy, and it took everything he had to keep the cringe from his voice. "I need to get my head on straight and, honestly, I don't want to sit down at a dinner table with the two of you."

Alana sighed. "Will, you were sick. Hannibal knows that. If anything, he feels guilty for not catching it."

Will doubted that but kept it to himself. Instead, he stood and rummaged through his clothing. He tossed a plaid shirt and jeans onto the bed and kicked his boxers off, pressing the phone between his shoulder and cheek so he could pull his pants up past his bare ass. He had run out of clean boxers before his arrest and he wasn't doing anything but burning the dirty clothes left behind for four months.

"Listen, I appreciate the concern Alana but I'm a big boy. I know I'm not at my best right now, which is why I need Winston. I'll see Hannibal when I'm good and ready and not a minute before. I'm sure he still has the Friday slot open. Maybe I should stop by your place this morning, that way you don't have to worry about me in your apartment alone or waiting until you get back."

"Alright," Alana sighed again. "Give me an hour to clean up some."

"Thanks, Alana. Take your time. I have to call a cab."

"A cab?"

"Yeah. My car won't start. I'm going to fix it this afternoon."

"Maybe it's best to..."

"No," he cut her off. "Winston is more important. I can't calm down unless I know he's safe with me."

"Alright. Text me when you're on your way."

Picking Winston up had been extremely awkward, the only thing making it bearable was Winston's exuberance at seeing Will. The empath laughed, tears in his eyes, as he hugged the last remaining member of his pack close to him, breathing in his doggy-scent. Alana stood off to the side, stiff and biting her lip. She obviously wanted to talk, but Will made it plain with his body language that he didn't want to discuss anything at all with her.

It was difficult for him to decide who he was more pissed off with, Hannibal or Alana. Hannibal had framed him for murder, slept with Alana, and had probably been grooming Will into becoming a serial-killer, but Alana had slept with Hannibal, knowing full-well Will thought he was the Chesapeake Ripper. Hannibal was a sociopathic killer. Alana was gullible.

And Will had always considered idiocy to be the worse sin.

Will quickly loaded Winston and his things into the cab's back seat after promising the driver there wouldn't be a mess, and had the car drive to a exclusive vet in Baltimore. The vet

agreed to board Winston for the week or so until Will had a pet-friendly place of his own and accepted Will's cash payment readily.

After taking care of Winston, Purnell called to inform him of the expected settlement and so Will requested the cab driver take him back to DC, buying both the driver and himself lunch on the way. They made it in decent time and he tipped the driver far more than necessary, both for the man's patience and his discretion.

Getting to Purnell's office with security in tow and without alerting Jack to his presence had been a bit tricky, but he managed well enough and ignored the woman's attitude when she greeted him stiffly. They walked down the hall to a large conference room where a team of FBI administrators sat waiting for him. Will knew the intimidation game they were trying to play but, with everything that was on the line, Will refused to cow down to them. He purposefully crossed the room and sat in an empty seat, ignoring the slightly out-held hand of the man directly across from him. The man hesitated before he clenched his jaw and sat down. He pulled several files closer to him and flipped the top one open.

"Let's talk about your options here, Mr. Graham," he started.

Will leaned forward and tapped the top of the table with his knuckles. "No, let's talk about yours."

Purnell smirked slightly, Will catching the look from the corner of his eye, and crossed her hands on the table as Will continued over the man's blustering.

"You have two options. Give me exactly what I want or deal with the backlash of public criticism."

"How dare you!" A woman spoke up, her face flushed with anger.

"How dare you," Will shot back evenly. "Allowing a mentally unstable man who only wanted to use his ability to help this agency to be used and abused by a controlling, manipulative and obsessed agent. How dare you sit on your ass and watch me self-destruct, knowing Jack was driving me to it. Jack may have pushed me until I broke, but you made it possible for him to do it. You're the ones that are ultimately responsible for this entire cluster-fuck, and if you try to sweep this under the rug I will be selling my story to the highest bidder."

He ended his speech and leaned backwards in his chair, his arms crossed against his chest.

The other occupants were struck dumb for several long moments, Will's blatant hostility and righteous demeanor unsettling them. He had always been a pushover, eager to please or easy to manipulate into giving up. A few of the team members had witnessed such a scene before, their faces telling Will that they had expected him to be just as easy to browbeat into submission now as he had then.

Purnell cleared her throat and startled the other room's occupants out of their stupor. An older woman stared at Will sharply before standing and rounding the large table to sit in the empty seat beside him. She opened the file she had been carrying and slid it and a pen in front of Will.

"We couldn't guarantee the five percent tax rate, the IRS would only allow a reduction to 15 percent under the suffrage law. We increased the awarded damages to 13.9 million to compensate and took the withholding and FICA up front. The net amount will be transferred to an account of your choosing by end of business day today. We expect a No-Disclosure Agreement as well as the standard Settlement Agreement, General Release, and Covenant Not to Sue from you in return."

Will read through the forms carefully, setting one aside, and picked up the pen. Blue ink bled as he crossed out several lines on the isolated page, eliminating the unnecessary or insulting legal jargon. After he was done, he slid the edited forms back to the lawyer sitting beside him and watched with a small smile as her brow furrowed.

"I understand exactly what you want me to do and I'm not doing it. The only Covenant you're getting is a bilateral one. I don't sue you and you don't sue me. Either it's a specific period of time or it's permanent. Also, your description of lawsuit limitations is too broad. You're not backing me into a corner if you decide to harass me or target me in a future investigation. I won't sue you for falsely imprisoning me - this time - but I'm not waving any of my other due-rights because you fucked up and are paying me to go away."

The empath had studied criminal and general law while getting his masters and made it a habit to refresh his memory in case a situation such as this cropped up. It was clear to him that several of the men and women across the table were torn between anger and amusement at his legal maneuvering. The man directly across from him sighed in aggravation and looked at the woman beside Will.

"Kate?"

Kate read the changes over and nodded at the man. "They're fine. If we unfairly target him or cause damage to him, his family, or property, he has the right to due-process. We're still sufficiently covered."

He huffed but nodded, glaring at Will as Kate initialed the changes and then signed all the forms. Will signed after her and three of the others added their signatures to the official documents, a notary completing the entire process.

"Congratulations Mr. Graham," Kate said, sticking her hand out to Will. "You're a free man with ten million dollars. What are you going to do?"

Will took her hand in a firm grasp. "Get the hell out of Dodge."

Kate and Purnell both snorted and Will shot the investigator behind him a look. Purnell shrugged her shoulders once and waited for the room to clear before motioning Will to follow her. He ambled along behind as she took the back stairs and unused hallways down to the garage where she escorted him to the main exit. The guard checked Will's visitor's badge in and noted the time of his exit and Will turned to give the older woman standing beside him a long look.

"I don't like you," he said simply, "But I'm going to give you a bit of advice, and I honestly hope you'll take it."

Will glanced at the security guard and looked back at Purnell. "You need to remove Jack from the case, he's too close. He'll never be able to see the complete puzzle. There's a lot of jig-saw pieces, Purnell, and Jack can't see some very important pieces being cut out of shape."

Purnell frowned and Will pressed on, completely willing to throw Jack under the bus if it meant putting distance between him and Will. Hannibal would have a harder time tracking Will down if Jack didn't have tabs on him. Also, Will had no inclination of playing cat-and-mouse with the psychiatrist if he was ever caught. He'd be far away when Hannibal escaped custody, which Hannibal would because Chilton was a fucking idiot.

"You need completely new eyes looking at this. Someone who has no ties, whatsoever, to the case. They can't talk to Jack, they can't let him see anything to do with the case. He's blind to the threat, and it's going to get him killed. Miriam Lass has already died, please don't let Jack endanger any of the others."

Both of them were quiet after Will's softly-spoken plea, Will grateful that Purnell would never know just how close they came to adding Beverly's name to the list of dead agents. He had narrowly managed to convince Bev that he had been wrong when she visited him in prison, and it most likely saved her life.

Purnell cleared her throat and nodded sharply before offering her hand to Will. "I always thought it was a bad idea to have you working for us, but despite that..." She looked away before straitening her shoulders and staring Will in the eye. "Despite that, I'll take your advice."

"Good. Jack isn't going to be happy, but it's for the best."

And really, it was for the best. Just not the Bureau's. It wasn't his fault Purnell couldn't see that.

Will walked aimlessly through D.C. until after close of business. He checked his account for the promised deposit, withdrew a tidy sum, and made his way to a rarely used payphone.

"Edgemoore Estate, this is Carole, how may I assist you?"

"Hi Carole. I've been trying to get a room in the area for the past few days with no luck. I was told by Sean at the Ramada Inn that you might have a room open."

"Unfortunately we're completely booked. I'm sorry sir. Perhaps you could try somewhere else?"

Will scowled at the barely veiled snobbery in her voice but forced himself to sigh tiredly. "Damn. I was really hoping you would be able to assist. Sean said that you'd be able to meet all my requirements."

"Requirements, sir?"

"Yes. I'm unable to travel for the near future and unfortunately my situation and condition has made it impossible for me to return to work. I am, in effect, trapped on the east coast for the next month or so. I'm a very private man by nature you see, so I was looking for something removed from the prying eyes of the public that would give me the solitude I prefer."

"I see," she murmured.

The empath continued. "I would have preferred a private establishment, not one of these god-awful hotel chains, but all the B&Bs I've tried have refused to accept my dog, even after I offered to pay double what the suite is worth."

"Double?"

Will smirked at the interest growing in the woman's tone. He nodded unnecessarily and sighed again. "He's such a good dog, you know, and he's been such a comfort to me these past years. I'm being forced to board him at a strange vet I don't know. Absolutely dreadful. Well, if you're completely booked, I understand. Perhaps you would know of another establishment I could try? One with a town car service would be ideal, I do so loath public transport."

There was a long silence on the other end before Will heard rapid typing. Carole cleared her throat and gave a very fake 'aha!'

"Just as I thought! It seemed odd that we were showing as booked when this is our slow season. I double-checked our reservations manually and see that we do have a room open."

"A room?" Will asked, letting her hear the ill-hidden displeasure.

"A suite, actually. One of our nicer ones. It's on the second floor, located at the back of the manor and has a full kitchen. Bedroom is separate from the sitting room."

"What amenities do you offer?"

"We offer a luxury car service, twice-daily house-keeping, internet access, 24-hour room and butler service - at an additional charge. There's more, but that can be discussed if you decide to reserve the suite."

Will remained quiet, letting her believe he was considering it. "And my dog? He won't be an issue. I've trained him very well. He won't do any damage, and if he does I would gladly pay for any replacements."

"We can make an exception."

He smirked. "Very good. I have last minute business to attend to tomorrow, so I'm afraid I'll have to stay here," he sneered, "until the day after. Could you please send a car for me Thursday afternoon?"

"Yes, of course. May I have your name sir?"

"William Graham. Also, I will need to arrange to speak with the owner. I have personal matters I feel I need to discuss with them before checking in."

"I'll have to ask," she said hesitantly. "But I don't think that should be a problem."

"Very good! I'll give you the address of the... hotel... I've been staying at. Dreadful place really, but if needs must. Also, I'm afraid my phone is broken. I'm trying to get a new one but the sales clerks are being less than helpful. I'll be at the hotel Thursday starting after one. Please send the car by then."

He rattled off the hotel in Arlington and ended the call, smiling at how effortless it was to lay a false personality over his own. It would appear that his time in the asylum wasn't completely a waste.

Will spent the remainder of the evening and the next day wandering the stores, using his understanding of Hannibal's patience to sustain him through the daunting process of updating his wardrobe. By the time he made it back to his hotel room the next night he had spent most of the money he had withdrawn on things he would have cringed at before being imprisoned, but he failed to feel bad about it. He reasoned that if it helped hide him from Hannibal and Jack for the next few months then so be it. He would simply have to get comfortable with wearing less plaid.

The town car arrived on time and the driver helped a clean-shaven Will load the matching set of luggage and new laptop that he bought that morning into the trunk of the shiny black vehicle. The remaining boxes were being stored at the hotel until Edgemoore returned for them later that day. Will hid behind black sunglasses and smoothed a nonexistent wrinkle in his suit trousers as he carefully slid into the back seat of the town car. He thanked the driver with a tip of his head and a small genuine smile and removed his sunglasses when the door snicked closed.

It was a long and silent drive to the reclusive bed and breakfast. The hotel was ideal for Will's situation and he knew that he could remain there for a month or so without anyone finding him. Will had never been to the Inn, had never mentioned it to anyone in passing or in any communication. It was a small irrelevant fact that stuck with Will throughout the years, a place that he would never willingly visit. It was too expensive and too much of a stereo-type of wealth for Will's taste.

He doubted even Hannibal would know where to start looking.

The car rounded a bend and turned onto a gated gravel drive that wound through a mile and a half of tree-lined drive until one last curve revealed the large estate-turned-inn. Will felt his breath leave him at the sight of the massive residence. It had once been an estate for a wealthy merchant family who lost the house and land in the Great Depression. A savvy entrepreneur had snapped the entire thing up and renovated it into what it was today, a truly impressive luxury bed and breakfast for weddings and the recluse.

The driver stopped out front and opened the car door for Will, and the empath nodded his thanks again before traversing the stone steps to the main entrance. He opened the door and felt his entire body relax at the tastefully decorated lobby, instinctively knowing he could rest and recuperate here.

A young woman stood off to the side behind a large oak counter, a computer monitor peaking up from behind the raised backing. She was blonde and in her mid-twenties, and Will knew that she was Carole from his phone conversation. She looked up as he entered, her eyes quickly raking over his expensive suit and carry-bag, and smiled at him pleasantly.

"You must be Mr. Graham."

"Guilty as charged," Will said with an answering smile, wrapping his personality up in as much charm as he could stomach.

It clearly worked because Carole blushed a flattering shade of pink and cleared her throat. She held out her hand and giggled as Will placed a kiss on the back of it. The empath's smile deepened at her regression into a school-girl and waited patiently for her to collect herself.

"Well," she cleared her throat again. "Welcome to Edgemoore Estate, Mr. Graham. As you know, my name is Carole, and I am the bed and breakfast's manager."

"Thank you, Carole." Will glanced at his watch. "I do hope the owner is able to meet with me."

Carole nodded. "Yes. I spoke with her after your call yesterday. Normally she won't meet with guests, but you intrigued her. Mrs. Lambert is waiting in the main office."

Will followed the manager to the office and thanked her with a dashing smile that sent her into another flush. She motioned at the closed door and he knocked gently, waiting for the muffled 'enter' before opening it.

The room was different from the rest of the building Will had seen so far, it had a lived-in feeling instead of the empty atmosphere in the echoing lobby. The desk and the chairs around it were expensive but well-worn and taken care of. Book cases lined the far wall and massive windows stood behind the desk, framing the older woman who owned the hotel in warm sunlight.

As Mrs. Lambert stood and motioned for Will to take a seat, he noticed her short stature, barely reaching five feet, and a sense of steel about her that the empath immediately liked. There was a hard-won assuredness to her. Trauma, Will thought instinctively, most-likely from domestic abuse or rape. He could tell from first glance that she knew who he was and wasn't going to take anything less than the truth.

"I'm surprised," she murmured as Will took a seat. "Here I thought you were in prison, Mister Graham."

Will let his masks drop and gave the older woman a pained smile. "I was released Monday. The real murderer made it very clear they didn't like others pretending to be them."

She hummed and sat back in her chair, observing him with a shrewd gaze. "It hasn't made the papers."

"The FBI is sitting on it until they have a way of spinning it to minimize damage. I don't hold out much hope for it being contained much longer."

"Which is why you're here." It wasn't a question.

Will nodded. "I have no connections with Edgemoore. No one would think to look in a place like this, it's far too fancy for my taste."

"And expensive," she pointed out.

He laughed. "I don't have to worry about that anymore."

Lambert watched him for a long moment before giving him a shark's grin. "Paid you to go away, did they?"

"Definitely," Will returned her mirth. He sobered and straightened in his seat. "I need to know if this is going to be a problem. I'd like to stay a month at least, probably longer."

The owner pulled a pad of stationary from a drawer and began writing a list. She finished the last line and passed it to Will.

"That's an estimate of what you'd be paying. If you're willing to pay it up front, I'll make sure the staff bends over backwards for you."

Will glanced at the amount listed and raised an eyebrow. "That's awfully steep."

"You're running from the press, Mr. Graham. I'll need Carole to rearrange the staffing to ensure discretion and maintain your privacy. That will be costly. Also, there are the exclusive amenities and the long-term reservation of one of our most popular suites. You want to be anonymous, Mr. Graham? Doable, but it comes at a price."

"My dog?"

Lambert waved a hand. "I don't care about the dog. If he ruins the carpet I'll just charge you for the replacement."

Will laughed.

"You told Carole you had a condition?" she asked, drumming her fingers on the desktop. "Was that a lie or do we need to make arrangements for you?"

Will bit his his lip as he analyzed the situation. He knew the staff would realize sooner or later, even if he hid himself away in his rooms. It would probably be best to let them know right away so they could plan around him if necessary. The empath sighed and ran a hand over his face tiredly.

"I'm pregnant," he said eventually.

Lambert scowled, her fingers tightening into a fist. Will met her eyes and quickly realized what she was thinking. He shook his head firmly, sitting forward.

"No," he assured her. "It was from a brief affair I had shortly before my arrest, not a result of my incarceration. I didn't realize until a couple months ago."

While his words put her at ease, Will knew that she didn't completely believe him. Not that he blamed her. The longer he sat with her the more sure he was that she had suffered from an abusive husband, a man who didn't care about the damage he did as long as he got his due, especially in the bedroom.

As useful as his empathy was proving to be, Will hated how easy it was to read a person's entire history from a conversation. It wasn't right that he dissected Mrs. Lambert, even if he didn't mean to. The new ease of Will's ability both startled and frustrated him, avoidance of eye contact no longer being a successful tool for managing his disorder.

"No one knows I'm pregnant," he pressed, using what he knew of Mrs. Lambert to ensure her cooperation. "Everyone but the father would assume it was an inmate's."

"And the father?" She was composed but her voice betrayed her true feelings.

Will looked away and hunched over slightly, hugging his abdomen. "He'd know it was his."

Lambert's lips thinned. "You're running from him, not the press."

"I'm running from both," he countered.

"But mostly from him."

Will reluctantly nodded. "He's not what I thought he was. He's dangerous, but no one would believe me."

Lambert turned her head to stare at the bookshelves. The room lapsed into a thick silence that was only broken when the woman cleared her throat. Will tore his gaze from the windows and focused on her stern stare.

"It's not my place, but you need to take care of yourself. If that means hiding from your lover, than so be it. I'll make it clear to Carole that discussing you is off limits. Only one or two staff members will be allowed in your room. It will cut down on the cleaning service, but I have a feeling you don't really care about that."

Will shook his head. "I'd prefer to be left alone as much as possible."

"Understandable," she said. "We'll book you under a false name, and no one but Carole and I will know. Paying in cash will help hide your trail."

"That won't be an issue. Get me a solid figure and I can have the bank gather the funds."

"If you're willing to wait, I can get that to you now. The 24-hour room and butler services will be all-inclusive and I'll throw in the car service for free. You'll be paying enough as it is."

"Thank you," Will breathed in relief.

Lambert nodded and began drafting an invoice on the laptop she removed from the keyboard drawer. She printed two copies off and handed one to Will, adding the second to a manilla folder she pulled from a filing cabinet. Will whistled at the price but acknowledged that Lambert was right, privacy did come with a price tag.

"That would include everything for six months," Lambert said. "If things go well, I can see about leasing one of our cottages to you at a reduced price. They're farther back on the property, in the wooded area, but are more private. I usually use them for honeymooning couples, but there's one or two that would work for a family."

Will felt his throat close up and he could only nod to the woman in gratitude. She seemed to understand because her eyes softened and she pulled a piece of stationary in front of her and jotted something down.

"This," she said as she handed it to him, "is the contact information for a very respectable wealth management company. I'm sure you want to keep that money you swindled the FBI out of. You'll lose it like water if you don't invest. They can help, and they're very discrete."

"Thank you."

Lambert shrugged before pressing a button of an intercom Will only noticed then. "Carole? Please come in. I have things I need to discuss."

Carole quickly returned and sat down at Mrs. Lambert's signal.

"Mr. Graham is a very important individual, and now he's going to be a very important guest."

The younger woman nodded, her demeanor serious as she listened to her employer.

"There will be reporters looking for him and while they will not necessarily think to look for him here, they might still get lucky. Mr. Graham is paying for his privacy, and you and I will do everything in our power to guarantee it. We'll take steps to ensure this, booking him under a false name for starters, and if the vultures learn about his presence here from the staff I will hold you personably accountable."

Carole paled before nodding once again. "Of course."

"Now, please have Mr..." Mrs. Lambert paused, looking to Will.

"Brighton," he provided instinctively. "Thomas Brighton."

"Please have Mr. Brighton escorted up to his suite. After that, return and we'll discuss matters further."

Will stood and shook hands with Mrs. Lambert, giving her a smile as he did so. "I'll get the funds to you tomorrow, depending on how quickly they can comply."

"Please do."

Will settled into Edgemoore with startling ease. The staff was respectful, even as they kept their distance, and soon learned to anticipate any need he may have. He expressed his gratitude to Carole after he found saltines and clear soda in the kitchen after a particularly bad case of morning-sickness.

Time passed and his fifth month of pregnancy bled into his sixth and Will was feeling both better and worse for it. While he wasn't experiencing the harsher symptoms of the pregnancy often, they were extreme when he did. Sickness would last for hours, tiredness would have him confined to his bed for days at a time.

Mrs. Lambert - "Celeste, dear" - took to visiting him every so often in the evenings. They took their dinners together and chatted about Will and the baby, about his plans for when the child was born. Celeste admitted to what Will already knew; her husband had been a bastard who had died not many years into the marriage. Will knew there was more to it than that, but respected the woman enough not to pry.

"You should be seeing a doctor," Celeste accused one evening as they sat by the balcony door, watching Winston contentedly chewing on a raw-hide bone.

Will sighed and rubbed his belly, finally large enough to be visible through clothing. "I know, I know."

"What if something happens, Will? You need a doctor who can take care of you."

"I can't just make an appointment Celeste," he complained. "I need a specialist. Freddy Lounds would pick it up in an instant. I've come too far to have her ruin everything."

Celeste frowned in thought. "There are private doctors."

"Specializing in male obstetrics?"

She nodded. "A few. There's one in Baltimore."

Will bit his tongue against the instinctive refusal. He had been avoiding all things Baltimore since the day he paid his hotel bill, being content to remain on the Edgemoore property and away from prying eyes. There was the distinct possibility of running into Hannibal in Baltimore, or running into someone who knew Hannibal.

Both were unacceptable.

"She has a private clinic," Celeste cajoled, resting her hand on Will's. "I know you don't want to, but she's the closest and has a good reputation."

"You've already researched this." Will let his exhaustion show as he ran a hand through his hair.

"I'm worried. Pregnancy shouldn't have you too tired to get out of bed or throwing up all day."

If truth be told, Will was worried too so he patted Celeste's hand and agreed to make an appointment. They spent the next while in companionable silence until Will yawned one too many times and Celeste ushered him off to bed.

Will stared at his old phone with dread.

He had removed the battery before he had arrived at Edgemoore, not wanting to risk anyone tracking him to the bed and breakfast, and hadn't turned it on since. The battery had needed a complete recharge before the phone would activate, and Will really didn't want to see just how many messages and voicemails he had received in the past two months. With guilty fingers he flipped the phone open and stared down at the blinking screen.

One hundred and four text messages, eighty-six voicemails.

Will winced and sorted the texts by sender, blindly deleting the ones from Jack and Freddy Lounds. He glanced at a few from Alana before deciding to delete them as well, her disapproving tone serving to irritate Will more than he thought possible given his previous infatuation with her. He had a sinking suspicion that part of his new-found annoyance with her was out of spite.

He read every one of the texts from Hannibal though, sitting in his favorite chair, pillows wedged behind his back and feet propped up on the matching ottoman. He scrolled through them with slow methodicalness, noticing that they all conveyed the same message.

Come back, don't hide.

Will kept them.

He also listened to every one of the sixty-nine voicemails from the man, one for everyday Will was gone, starting the first Friday evening after his release.

'You missed your appointment,' it started, Hannibal's tone blank and unreadable. 'I went to check on you and noticed your car and personal belongings were missing. I know you must still be upset with me, or with yourself, but running isn't the answer, Will. Let me help you.'

Will laughed himself sick over that first voicemail. He had listened to the second on the bathroom floor, his head leaning over the toilet as his dinner and then bile disappeared down the white bowl. The black stag stood beside him, keeping him company in his misery.

Hannibal's growing frustration was clear in the messages as they spanned into the two-week mark, his voice slowly filling with rarely-heard annoyance. Will didn't feel bad about it. Instead, the guilt came later when the psychiatrist slowly became more and more desperate, some messages on the verge of pleading.

'Why are you hiding from me Will? Why won't you let me find you?'

The answer to that should have been fucking obvious, Will thought bitterly. Will had no doubt Hannibal would gut him the instant they were in a room alone together. There was no way the older man hadn't figured out by now Will realized, or at least strongly suspected, the doctor's guilt in the Chesapeake Ripper murders. Freedom was a coveted thing to the other, and Will was confident that the doctor had killed in the past to protect it. How else was Miriam Lass' murder explained away? The Ripper murdered pigs, rude souls that didn't deserve life, and Lass was anything but that. She had been smart and driven, yet polite and thoughtful, not someone that would be a likely candidate for the Ripper. The only explanation was that she got too close.

Will had gotten far closer than that particular little FBI trainee though, the coveted prize in his belly was proof of that, and he'd be foolish to stray too close to the viper in his condition.

The voicemails continued and Hannibal eventually seemed to accept Will wasn't returning, not right away at least, accepting that Will needed time. The man left a short message on day thirty-four that made the empath's heart ache, the older man's tired capitulation tearing at the pregnant man's composure.

'You win. Just, when you're ready, come home. Please.'

After that, Hannibal's remaining voicemails were all snapshots of the man's day, meant to show Will that, while he hadn't given up on him, Hannibal was willing to give the younger man the space he needed. The empath couldn't help but notice that not one recording mentioned Alana. It was pure, unadulterated, emphatic manipulation at its most cunning and compelling, meant to wrench at Will's guilt and expose his location and throat to an expert predator.

Will kept the voicemails.

He turned off the phone after the last Hannibal message finished, removed the battery, and stored the now useless mobile in a dresser drawer.

It was a long time before Will got to sleep that night.

Doctor Burnam was close to Will's age and very proficient. Their first meeting had Will on her exam table, shirtless and pants undone, hooked up to an ultrasound. He watched with

wide-eyed amazement as she located his baby's heartbeat, pointing out the various parts of the infant's anatomy with a patient smile.

It had been a relief when Burnam had relieved his fears about any damage done to the fetus from when he was treated for the encephalitis. There was no telling what the potent drugs pumped through his system could have done to the baby, but they apparently had not affected the lump of cells that had been too minuscule for detection at the time. Chilton's later treatments had also caused no damage. Burnam had made sure by performing an amniocentesis, both for Will's peace of mind and the case of abuse he could tell she was planning against the prison psychiatrist.

"A girl? I'm having a girl?"

Will laughed, tears rolling down his cheeks and Burnam had to help him sit up, her hands sure and steady on his arms and shoulders as she raised the back of the table to support him. She gave him a box of tissue and printed out several snap shots of the baby for him to keep.

"I want to see you every two weeks, Will," she said sternly as he buttoned his shirt. "You're old enough that pregnancy should be closely monitored."

"And the morning-sickness and exhaustion?"

"While it's not common for most to have such extremes in the side-effects, it can happen. Unfortunately, you're one of the few lucky ones."

Will gave her a bland smile. "Yay me."

"Yes, well," she commiserated. "It won't be for much longer. Male pregnancies don't tend to last as long. You're not as well built for it as us women. You're seven months now and I'd estimate you have about a month and a half left. Thirty-six weeks feels about right to me. Thirty-two is the usual, but you're not as stressed as most by this point. Be warned, if she wants to stay in there longer, then we'll let her."

Will set up the bi-weekly appointments and went on his way with a smile, staring down at the grainy images of the child inside his body as he took the elevator down to the basement garage. As he ran his fingers over the head and arms and legs, he suddenly realized the enormity of the situation he was in. It slammed into him and he leaned back against the stainless steel wall, gripping the railing as he tried to fully grasp his new reality.

He was going to have a child. Finally, after all the years of unwilling isolation since his father's death, Will was going to have family again. There would be someone to love him, that he could love in return, and that person was going to be relying on him completely for their well-being. He'd be their everything, and it was suddenly debilitatingly frightening to be dealing with this own his own.

It felt as if his chest was being squeezed, all the air in his lungs being wrung out of him like a wet towel. He barely noticed when the metal doors slid open, the growing panic feeding off his mounting hysteria. Will stumbled out of the elevator and leaned against the concrete wall, gasping for air.

"Mr. Brighton!"

Suddenly Will wasn't alone, Brady, the driver that accompanied Will, was beside him and easing him down onto the ground even as he pulled his cellphone out. He dialed a number and spoke rapidly to the person on the other end, snapping the phone closed after a rushed conversation.

"Hold on, Mr. Brighton, the doc's coming."

Will wanted to nod but the pressing need for air kept him busy. He forced his lungs to expand with steady and quick inhales through his nose, an effort to curb the attack, and he had almost succeeded when the stairwell slammed open and Doctor Burnam and a nurse came careening out into the garage.

They knelt beside Will and quickly took control of the situation. The nurse calmed Brady and Burnam talked Will through the attack. She took his pulse and ran a hand through his hair as the last of the tremors left him, and checked him over when the attack was done.

"You said you've had anxiety attacks before?" Burnam asked.

Will nodded. "Not for months though, half a year at least."

Burnam checked his pulse again. "Do you have any idea what caused it?"

He laughed and showed her the pictures. "I'm having a baby."

The group was struck silent until the nurse snorted, sending the others into a fit of laughter as well. Will laughed until he was crying, clutching the pictures to his chest with one hand and wiping at the wet trails on his cheeks with the other.

"I'm having a baby," he repeated unnecessarily, his expression twisted into a goofy smile.

"Yes," Burnam said with a soft grin. "You are."

Will sat in his chair, hand rubbing his enlarged belly, and stared at the second set of ultrasound photos Burnam had given him. His second appointment with her had been the day before, and it had gone much smoother than the first. She had pronounced that, at seven and a half months, he was well on his way to a healthy baby girl and had even extended his delivery date another two weeks, making it eight and a half months total. Will felt pure relief when she said he only had a month left before they could do a cesarean. While he had the parts to carry the baby, Burnam joked, he didn't have them to get rid of it.

Or feed it, he tacked on. Burnam had noted the lack of breast development and explained that it wasn't uncommon for some men. Will's body had apparently decided to forgo the breast feeding, much to his relief. Despite already loving the baby more than he had anyone else,

there were some things he just wasn't comfortable doing. Also, it was becoming more unpleasant every day BG continued to grow.

Will ran his fingers over the baby's face and turned his attention to the phone on the table beside him. Fourteen new voicemails from Hannibal and each one as calm and accepting as the one before it. The psychiatrist was slowly but surely whittling away at Will's self-control and Will knew it was completely intentional on the older man's part. Hannibal was perfectly capable of waiting however long he needed to for his quarry to slip up or simply give in.

The empath had long realized just what it was that Hannibal wanted from him. The man wanted someone to see and understand him for who he was and accept him because of it, not in spite of it. Hannibal had invested so much of his time and energy into Will because Will was his only chance of having all that. Who better to understand Hannibal Lecter than the man with perfect empathy?

Will just missed his friend.

"I had the most entertaining evening last night," Celeste said conversationally.

Will groaned as he readjusted himself in the chair, his back cramping from the strain on his middle. He hummed, half-interested, and rubbed his abdomen miserably. Eight months pregnant and just he wanted the kid out of him. Burnam had extended his date another two weeks, making it nine months total, saying that as long as his body didn't show signs of labor they would put the surgery off. It was better for the baby the longer she remained inside Will, developing internally rather than externally. Will knew that if the impending month of pregnancy was anything like the past few days it was going to be pure hell.

"The opera, Serse. A splendid production."

"That's nice," he said distractedly, grunting as he shifted.

He watched as Winston panted happily from his dog bed on the other side of the living room, the dog's warm brown eyes watching Celeste with yearning. The older woman had quickly trained the dog to not jump on her and Will was surprised at how well Winston seemed to take the kind rejection. Of course, the sausage he was getting slipped whenever the woman visited, Will contemplated ruefully, probably had something to do with it.

Celeste sipped at her tea. "I was seated with a very interesting party. A group of psychiatrists."

The discomfort in his lower back was forgotten as Celeste's statement registered in Will's mind. He stilled and looked at the older woman, forced casualness permeating his posture. "A group? Wouldn't that be a murder?"

Celeste laughed and waved a hand. "Oh, stop it. I'm trying to tell you about my evening. Now, as I said, a group of psychiatrists. Two men and a woman."

Will's stomach clenched in dread.

"The woman obviously wanted to be anywhere but there. She was seated in between the two men. The one on the far side - a pompous jackass if I ever met one - spent the entire night hitting on her. The other one, the gentleman I was sitting beside, found the entire thing hilarious. He wasn't rude enough to laugh, but I could tell. She apparently knew that as well because she left after the first half."

Will sat listening with ill-contained rapture, knowing he shouldn't feel happy about Alana's issues with Chilton and Hannibal's seeming indifference to it.

"The gentleman, hm... what was his name again? Something exotic..." Celeste trailed off, her face creasing with frustration when the name escaped her.

Will closed his eyes in resignation. "Hannibal. Hannibal Lecter."

"Yes! That's it. How did you know?" Celeste asked, watching as Will rubbed his stomach and grimaced in discomfiture that was clearly not related to the baby. Her eyes widened slightly and she murmured, "Oh. Oh dear."

He gave her a strained smile. "Small world. You didn't mention me, did you? He's good at wheedling information out of people."

"No," she assured. "We merely discussed the opera and other such things. Oh dear, really? I know what you mean now when you said no one would believe you. He's very charming."

"As a viper," Will mumbled.

"Maybe it's for the best that I turned down his dinner invitation then."

Will's eyes shot open. "You turned it down?"

"Yes. Unfortunately it was on my only free night that particular week. I wanted to catch up on my reading. I'm going to charity functions the rest of the week, I wanted to spend the one night I had to my self."

"What excuse did you give him?"

"Just that. It's my only free night and I wanted to spend it at home." Celeste watched him with veiled worry. "Should I not have?"

He grimaced again and thought the problem through. "I'd write him, let him know that you're sorry you couldn't attend but perhaps in the future you would if the offer was still open."

"Alright, I'll send the letter tomorrow."

Will nodded. "Hannibal abhors the rude. Turning down his dinner parties are borderline, depending on how you go about doing it."

"I thought I was very sincere," Celeste huffed.

"Send the letter still."

Will knew things were going too well to last.

Two nights after his conversation with Celeste, Will returned from a short stroll in the garden to find Freddy Lounds in his rooms. She had his phone assembled in her hand and was listening to one of Hannibal's voicemails on speaker.

"Well, look at you Graham," she drawled in that politely insulting tone she always preferred. She eyed his swollen middle and waved the phone in her hand. "Whose is it? Lecter?"

"Get out."

The reporter smirked and shut the phone off, tossing it carelessly onto the sofa. "You don't know, do you? You can't be more than seven months, so it had to have been someone at the prison."

"Out!"

"I bet it's that orderly's, Matthew Brown. The one that tried to murder Doctor Lecter for you."

Will crossed into the kitchen and braced his weight on the countertop, his hands splayed wide on the black marble. He refused to show any more weakness to the jackal in front of him then he already had. Freddy watched him with a small smile, her red hair framing her pale face, distracting most people from her obvious ill-intent. The empath didn't know how she had found him but he didn't appreciate the sudden intrusion in his life when he was so defenseless.

"You owe me an interview, Graham."

"And I can already guess the headline. Save your breath, Freddy, because you're not getting anything from me. I just want to be left alone. So leave, before I call security."

Freddy glowered before she waved a manicured hand at him. "Don't be that way, Graham. We worked well together in the past."

"Only because you were more invested in getting a genuine inside scoop than backstabbing your source. Our interests temporarily lined up, that's all."

"They're lined up now, too."

Will scoffed and motioned towards his stomach. "I highly doubt that."

Freddy shook her head. "The FBI, Graham. We both want to hurt them and we need each other to do it."

The empath laughed. "I've already hit them where it hurts. There's no point selling my soul to you."

"Maybe I should be writing about something else then," she drawled, her voice tinged with annoyance. "Maybe about predisposition to insanity in children? It's proven to be hereditary after all, and, as we know Mister Graham, you do think about killing people for a living."

The threat, more of a promise knowing Freddy like he did, was real. Freddy was perfectly willing to carry it out if it bought her readers, no matter how much damage it would do to Will and his daughter. There would be no way of hiding if Freddy published his pregnancy. Hannibal, ever the avid Tattle-Crime reader, would know immediately and Will wouldn't stand a chance. Will, if he even survived the reunion, would never be free. It was careless and heartless, everything Freddy embodied, and it made something in Will snap. He felt his body go numb and his face twist into a distressed grimace. He gripped his stomach with one hand as a low groan escaped him.

"Graham?" Freddy sounded unsure. She moved forward but stilled after a single step in his direction, her sense of self-preservation kicking in and making her wary of approaching him.

Will doubled over and clutched at his middle, distressed wheezing escaping him. His knees started to buckle but he caught himself by the hand still remaining on the counter top. He pressed his forehead down onto the cool granite and whined, a high-pitched sound that had Winston barking from where he was shut away in the bedroom.

"Graham, what's wrong?"

Freddy finally gave in and rounded the kitchen counter to stand beside him, fear filling her gaze when she saw the shape Will was in. "Oh my god! Hold on, I'll get help."

She turned to grab the suite phone to call the front desk and Will acted. He straightened, grabbed her by her hair, and slammed her head down onto the edge of the counter. Her skull cracked, and blood spattered onto the lower cupboard doors as her body fell face down on the tiled floor with a sickening thump of flesh. Blood rapidly pooled beneath her forehead and Will watched it spread with disinterest, his hand rubbing soothing circles over his belly.

Some time later, Will found himself sitting on the ground beside Freddy's corpse staring at it blankly, his hands cradling his stomach and the baby inside him as if to protect it from the ugly sight before him. That was how Celeste found him, sitting and staring, his clothes soaking up the dead woman's blood. The hotel owner stood in the opening of the kitchen, taking everything in before she stepped around the corpse and knelt beside Will.

"Are you hurt?" she asked calmly as she gently cupped her hands around Will's cheeks, turning his head in her direction, trying to break Will's morbid stare.

Will shook his head, eyes still locked onto Freddy's red hair. "She was going to write an article about the baby."

Celeste stared at the body, obviously trying to place the bloody face with a name, before she stood and helped Will up. She undressed him, tossed the bloody clothing onto the corpse, and cleaned his face and skin with wet paper towels. After Will was clean, she walked him into the living room and sat him in the chair.

"Stay."

Will stayed.

She left and ten minutes later returned with a flat-cart and a large empty box. Will watched her wrap Freddy's ruined head in spare towels and went to help her maneuver the body and other evidence into the empty box, taping it shut. They loaded it back onto the cart and Celeste cleaned the kitchen in silence, pouring bleach over the spot where the blood had been without Will needing to tell her.

Will dressed in dark clothing and helped Celeste take the body down to the lower level, wheeling the cart outside and down to the secondary utility building where the hotel's handmade pottery and glassware was created. Together, they heaved the box into the rarely used industrial kiln and lit it, Celeste raising the temperature until it would eventually burn Freddy's body to ash.

They stood next to each other in silence as the heat built until Will smelled flesh burning and reached for Celeste's hand. She gripped his firmly and he pulled her to him, sliding down to the ground. The older woman sat beside him and gently tugged until his head rested in her lap. She brushed her fingers through his curls idly while they waited, the movements smooth and soothing.

Will hadn't bothered with telling Celeste the needed temperature, he'd known she already knew it.

Celeste ushered Will to bed in the early hours of the morning and carded a hand through his hair affectionately once more before disappearing out of the suite, most likely to dispose of Freddy's car and belongings before the day staff arrived. At eight months, Will was incapable of that level of physical activity. The trip to the furnace had been enough to exhaust him, his body positively throbbing from the stress. Moving a human corpse wasn't easy, no matter how light it was, and it left Will feeling tired in more ways than one.

Will knew there would be a sudden need for new decorations and dishes around Edgemoore in the next few weeks; plates and glasses dropped by a clumsy washer, hand-blown vases and ornaments accidentally knocked off tables. Each replacement would have to be crafted and fired in the kiln, requiring a thorough cleaning and service before the first batch. Freddy's ashes would be scooped up and chucked out with the garbage.

He distracted himself from the thought by dismantling his phone and wiping it clean of Freddy's fingerprints and DNA, replacing his where there was none. He held the phone up to his ear and spoke into the useless speaker, letting the ear print and his spittle transfer to the device to show usage. After he was done, Will turned it on and listened to the newest messages from Hannibal, the ones sullied by Freddy.

It wasn't a gradual process, Will deciding to give in to the older man's manipulations. Instead of the hours he should have taken to weigh his options, Will simply listened to the final voicemail and hit dial. He winced as he saw the time and knew the other male would, most likely, still be asleep.

"Will?"

Hannibal sounded like himself, a little tired maybe but nothing to indicate he had been sleeping in the early hour of the morning. The familiarity hit Will like a tidal wave, and the empath's throat closed up and tears filled his eyes. It was impossible for him to speak, to acknowledge the older man, and Will silently cursed the excess hormones running through him that made it nearly impossible to control his emotions.

"Will?" The psychiatrist's tone was much more alert and filled with something the younger man thought was worry. "Are you there?"

"Hi," he managed eventually, his voice soft and thick with tears.

Hannibal sighed in relief and fabric rustled as the man shifted in bed. Will heard a lamp click on and could picture the man sitting up, yellow light spilling across his body as he held the phone to his ear.

"You finally called, I'm glad."

There was a wealth of intent behind that sentence, and Will knew that Hannibal was both glad Will called and glad that he had an opportunity to locate the younger man.

"I'm sorry," Will apologized. "I didn't know what to do."

"You don't need to apologize." Hannibal's voice was soothing. "You've done nothing wrong."

Will remained quiet as he carefully shifted to lay down in the bed, the soft pillows supporting his head and enlarged belly. He grunted from the effort and sighed as he finally rested in a comfortable position. The baby kicked and Will rubbed at the tiny foot protruding outwards. For a brief second Will imagined it was another's hand touching him, soothing BG and easing the aches Will suffered with long fingers and steady strokes.

"Are you alright?"

It took a moment for Will to register the question, to shake his wishful thinking aside and focus, and he eventually gave a tired chuckle. "I'm fine."

The other end of the phone remained silent until Will grunted again as he turned slightly. "You sound as if you're in pain."

"I'm alright," Will assured him.

"Will, where are you?"

The question was innocent enough but it set off every warning bell in Will's mind. His lips thinned in restrained fear but he forced his finger away from the disconnect button. It took a few seconds for him to work up the courage to respond, to deny Hannibal his prey.

"I can't."

"Will..." Hannibal sighed, a sound full of pleading. "Please, let me help you."

"I can't," Will's voice broke slightly.

"Why not?" the psychiatrist coaxed, the man recognizing Will's wavering determination.

Will pressed a palm flat against the baby, the feeling that he'd misstepped somewhere beginning to eat away at his composure. "Because you'll kill me."

The silence was deafening, the man on the other end seemingly turned to stone. Will closed his eyes and rubbed the leaking wetness from the corners of his lids. He sniffled once, a pathetic sound that made it clear he was crying, and Hannibal let out a breath.

"Tell me where you are, Will. I'll come get you."

Will wanted to laugh at the badly-veiled double entendre but shook his head, the pillows softly crinkling from the movement. "I can't."

"Will..." Hannibal's stern voice barely hid the growing frustration the killer had to be feeling. He was so close to locating Will, yet unable to gain the final, crucial, clue needed. "You need to tell me where you are."

"I'm pregnant," Will blurted out instead.

Hannibal inhaled harshly and Will bit his lips as a new wave of tears escaped him.

"I'm sorry," he repeated helplessly. "I didn't know what to do."

"Will..." the older man started hesitantly, his lauded composure shattered for once.

"This was a mistake."

Will felt his chest and shoulders hitch from the impending sobs and hung up, hearing the loud "Will. Will!" before the line went dead. He ripped the battery out of his phone and threw it across the room, a frustrated wail echoing as the piece of plastic hit the wall with an unsatisfying thwack.

"You're both doing well," Burnam said Tuesday afternoon as she put the ultrasound away and handed over the last set of pictures. "We scheduled the c-section for Thursday after next at General so, unless something happens, this will be the last time we see each other until then."

"Great!" Will smiled in pure relief, grunting as he tried to slide off the exam table. "Not that I don't like you, but I'll be glad when this spawn of Satan is finally out of me."

Burnam laughed and steadied him before helping him with his winter coat and walking with him to the waiting room. Brady stood up from his chair and took his place on the other side of Will, freeing Burnam from her escort duties. Will turned and shook her hand, a grateful smile splaying across his lips.

"Thank you so much. I don't know what I would have done without you."

The doctor smiled. "Call me anytime. This far along, it's important that I know immediately if something doesn't feel right."

Will nodded and let Brady help him to the elevator, the weight of his middle making it difficult for him to walk unassisted. He had nearly lost his balance twice already that day but he refused to use a wheelchair. While he knew he was pressing his luck, Will preferred to remain as independent as he could.

"Everything okay, Mr. B?"

"Wonderful. She'll be out in a couple weeks," Will grunted as he leaned against the elevator carriage, his hands supporting his stomach.

Brady punched the button for the garage. "That's great! I never would have thought Mrs. Lambert would allow a baby at Edgemoore."

Will remembered blood and burning flesh, long aged fingers running through sweaty curls. "She likes me."

"I'll say."

The metal carriage stopped and the doors slid open, Will groaning as he stood straight. Brady gently took his elbow and helped him towards the car but, few steps out of the elevator, the baby suddenly kicked, a harsh stab to his kidney, and Will's knees buckled from the pain. Brady shouted in surprise and grabbed for him, but Will knew the driver wouldn't be able to hold his weight. His hands shot out in front of him in a useless attempt to stop his fall and he closed his eyes in fatalistic fear.

Suddenly, strong arms slipped under Will's, locking around his shoulder joints and hefting him upwards, stopping him before he made contact with the unforgiving concrete. He was pulled backwards until he rested firmly against another's chest and his head leaned back against the stranger's shoulder. His eyes were closed and his breathing panicked from the

momentary terror, and as Will wrapped his arms around his middle he felt the fabric of his savior's expensive suit brush against his cheek.

"Mr. B!" Brady said, his voice filled with fear.

Will licked his lips but couldn't get the words past them, the slowly-leaving adrenalin weighed his tongue down. The man holding him up shifted grip and dropped his arms to rest across Will's chest, hands linked over his breast-bone, and the empath's nose twitched as he inhaled the good-samaritan's scent.

"Still against the bottle with a ship on it, Hannibal?"

Hannibal chuckled, his voice smooth as velvet when he answered. "Of course, dear Will."

Will sighed fatalistically and opened his eyes, giving Brady a tired smile. The driver relaxed and shot Hannibal an assessing look, clearly picking up on the tension Will was radiating. He stepped forward to relieve Hannibal of his burden, but the older male simply adjusted his hold on Will in one quick movement, sliding to Will's right side with his arms still locked around Will's chest.

"Please open the car door. It's best to get him sitting down as soon as possible."

Brady hesitated but jumped into action after the pregnant male nodded. The psychiatrist helped Will over and sat him down sideways on the back seat, his feet on the garage's concrete floor. He knelt in front of Will and examined him carefully. Large hands that had easily butchered more people than anyone could guess moved across Will's neck and head gently, taking his pulse and checking for fever, before they hesitated over the distended abdomen that held a fully-developed infant.

Will watched Hannibal with tired eyes, knowing he couldn't stop the man if the other meant any harm. It was interesting, Will thought idly, that a week and a half after hearing the man's shock, here he was seeing a matching uncertainty flash through the older man's eyes. Clearly this situation was one that had never occurred to the psychiatrist in all his planning and schemes. Will didn't blame him, no one could have seen this coming.

The baby kicked again and Will hissed in displeasure. Hannibal's eyes darted up to look at him and then immediately downwards as Will's thin fingers pressed against the lower-right quadrant of his belly, just under the swell. It wasn't visible beneath his coat but BG was doing her best to kick her way out, an isolated lump stretching out from the cocoon she was in.

A shoe scuffing loudly shocked both men out of the private moment that had developed around them and Hannibal cleared his throat awkwardly, standing and brushing his trousers off with firm flicks of his wrist. Will observed the older man's unease with ill-hidden amusement, something Hannibal noticed in return. The younger man slowly pulled his legs into the back seat of the town car and let the driver shut the door.

As Brady moved around the vehicle to get in and start the engine, Will rolled down the tinted window to observe Hannibal. "If you'll play nice, Hannibal, I'll let you visit."

Hannibal stared at him shrewdly before agreeing, one sharp nod, and Will started to roll the window closed.

"Edgemoore Estate, Thomas Brighton."

Chapter 2

Carole escorted Hannibal up to Will's suite that same evening. Will called out permission to enter so he wouldn't have to drag himself out of the plush chair he had occupied most of his pregnancy. Winston came bounding in from the bedroom, his tail wagging as he barked at Hannibal in remembrance. Hannibal pat the dog on the head and shooed him towards Will with a wave of a hand. Winston barked once more before padding over to his master, plopping down onto the dog-bed beside the chair, his head on his paws.

"Is there anything you'll be needing, Mr. Brighton?" Carole asked, dragging her attention away from where Hannibal stood to the side of the sitting room. She was clearly curious about the strange man suddenly visiting the bed and breakfast's most reclusive guest.

Will took in the bags Hannibal was carrying - one luggage and the other food - and smiled at the manager. "Dinner for two. Something light, grilled chicken maybe?"

Carole smiled indulgently. "Of course. I'll pass it along. Anything else?"

"If you would, please tell Celeste that we'll have to put off our breakfast unless she'd like to meet Doctor Lecter. If that's the case, then she's more than welcome."

The woman nodded and left, shutting the door softly behind her, making sure it latched.

Hannibal waited for the door to close before turning his attention to Will. He had a slight frown on his face and the empath knew he was annoyed by Will's maneuvering. The psychiatrist deposited his luggage onto the floor and indicated the food carrier he held.

"That was rude of you, Will."

Will shrugged. "I know perfectly well what's in there, and I'm not exposing BG to it. Put it in the fridge. You can always eat it later."

Hannibal raised an eyebrow but did as Will ordered. He placed the bag in the refrigerator and started back out, his stride slowing for a few seconds by the counter. The younger man noticed the flare of nostrils and felt his stomach twist in apprehension. The older male didn't stop however and reentered the sitting room to stand in front of Will.

A thick silence filled the space as they stared each other down, maroon eyes locked onto blue. They were alone for the first time in almost three quarters of a year, the visits to the prison not counting. Things seemed so much different after months removed from the man's influence. It was easier now to look through the manipulations and falsehoods of the person-suit Hannibal wore and see the monster swimming underneath. Will felt the charged energy surrounding the stronger man and knew he had to diffuse the other's tension and leeriness before Hannibal acted on his initial instinct to kill him.

Will grimaced as he shifted in his chair, reaching a hand back to adjust a pillow wedged behind him and rub at his belly ineffectually. Hannibal's attention was immediately caught by

the movement, eyes locked onto Will's long fingers as they gently pressed circles into his skin through the thin shirt he had changed into, and Will had to fight the smile that rose up unbidden. While Hannibal wasn't overly fond of children, a child with half of Will's genetic make-up was apparently almost if not equally as fascinating as its birth father.

"What were you doing at the office today? It was too much of a coincidence for my taste."

Hannibal looked away from Will's bulge and crossed over to the fireplace, kneeling to light the gas flames. He stood when the heat began to build and stared down at the flickering light. "I was meeting with Doctor Burnam."

"Why?" The question was casual, without a hint of accusation.

"My rotation in obstetrics was quite some time ago."

The other man's meaning was clear and Will's heart began to pound.

"You wanted to help."

Hannibal nodded. "If you had gone to this extreme a length to hide yourself away, it was obvious that you wanted to keep the child. I thought it necessary to brush up on my knowledge in order to ensure the health of both you and it."

Will swallowed roughly, his eyes momentarily watering before he fought the emotions down. He tilted his head in thought. "To tie me to you. Make me less likely to run."

Again Hannibal nodded, unconcerned with how cold that made him appear. "Imagine my surprise when the elevator opened and there you were, in the flesh after so many months apart. Destiny asserting herself."

"How about sheer dumb luck?" Will chuckled.

"You're farther along than I thought you'd be," Hannibal said, abruptly changing the topic.

It was a carefully baited trap, Will knew, casual words that had so much more meaning than what could be gleamed from the surface. The empath hadn't forgotten how the psychiatrist loved his word games. Will, of course, caught the slight edge to the words, something he was tempted to label as possessiveness.

"My obstetrician is doing the c-section Thursday after next."

"Seven and a half months then?"

Will forced down a smirk, knowing perfectly well what Hannibal was doing.

He was trying to nail down a timeline so he could rule out candidates for the other father. It wouldn't be too difficult of a thing to do. Will hadn't been allowed into general population, so the only option would be the few staff members that had the high enough clearance that allowed them to get close enough to Will to impregnate him. Chilton and Matthew were

probably at the top of the list. It was comforting to know Hannibal would kill Will's would-be rapist, even if it was only because he was jealous.

"It'll be nine, actually. Burnam wanted me to go as long as possible to prevent premee side-effects."

Hannibal's mind turned the new fact over, and the pregnant male could tell when the implication struck because the doctor stilled before turning to look at Will with the most intense expression the empath had ever seen from him.

"You are sure?"

Will didn't bother with being insulted like most would. Instead, a spark of dry humor licked its way out of him. "Well, she could just be a fast grower."

"I meant about her other parentage," Hannibal said lightly in frustration.

"Unless BG's the second coming and God dropped the ball about letting me know."

Hannibal was clearly not amused, restrained irritation bleeding through the controlled person-suit he wore.

Will rolled his eyes. "Yes, Hannibal, the spawn is yours."

"Assault occurs in prison," the other countered.

The brunette scoffed. "They thought I was the Ripper, Hannibal. No one was going to get close enough to noodle me."

Hannibal's mouth twisted in distaste at the crude terminology. "That orderly seemed oddly devoted to you."

Will laughed, a short full-belly sound that jerked him in his seat before he could smother it. "No one touched me inappropriately in prison," he drawled, ignoring the blatant accusation. "Do you want to break out the dolls to make sure?"

It garnered an eye-roll and a small twitch of thin lips so Will counted it as a victory. He closed his eyes and rubbed his palms over his rounded belly, gently messaging the baby-girl inside until she settled her slight rolling movements. Even though she seemed content to remain within her flesh-walled home, she was rarely still for extended periods of time. It drove Will to exhausted-frustration, during both day and night.

He opened his eyes and slid them over to Hannibal, the man still standing in front of the fire, his form back-lit by the orange crackling light. Again Will had to admit to himself that Hannibal was his preferred choice for the other parent. Intelligent, strong, capable, and good-looking, all very positive indicators for healthy offspring.

Will ignored the serial-killer and cannibal aspects, knowing enough about the other to realize that the older man's proclivity towards murder and flesh wasn't a genetic quirk. It was most likely due to trauma experienced when young, something horrible enough to warp Hannibal's

sociopathic tendencies and turn him into the razor-sharp predator that he was today. Hannibal's violence, like Will's psychosis, was not something Will would have to worry about being passed on to their off-spring. Nature had been kind, now all the younger man had to worry about was Nurture.

"Just so we can avoid the whole issue in the future," Will said after observing Hannibal for a brief while, "I don't like the fact that you were feeding me people without my consent and I don't want you to do it at all with BG."

Hannibal raised an eyebrow. "Without your consent?" he asked, picking up on Will's vague meaning easily.

Will shrugged. "It's one big joke for you, feeding people to people. You view your victims as nothing more than pigs, and aren't pigs meant to be eaten?"

The sitting room lapsed into a thick silence, blue eyes easily meeting maroon as the calmly-stated explanation and acceptance of Hannibal's sins reverberated between the two men. Hannibal stared at the pregnant male until his lips slowly widened, his mouth stretching into an exaggerated caricature of a genuine expression. Will's buried anxiety lessened as the slightly chilly gleam faded from the psychiatrist's eyes.

"Dear Will," the doctor murmured affectionately. "You've changed."

"No," Will countered with a shake of his head. "I've just stopped feeling guilty about being selfish. As long as you don't hurt anyone I care about, we'll be fine."

The empath drummed his fingers on the top of his distended abdomen and frowned slightly, trying to organize his thoughts into something understandable, something he could verbalize without diminishing its significance. He opened and closed his mouth like a fish, false starts aggravating him until he finally found the right words.

"I've always been this way," he said finally, looking away from Hannibal. "But I've accidentally layered so many different personalities over my own that I lost track of what was my own darkness versus that of those killers. What you did to me, it just made everything worse. Everything got tangled up into knots and then melded together by the encephalitis. It took me the majority of the time in the asylum for me to unravel enough of the mess to separate myself from them.

"Every time I became one of them, they left a piece behind and it took a long time to figure out how to get rid of those shards." Will stared vacantly at the wall straight ahead, barely noticing Hannibal shifting to face him more fully. "Once I did, I realized that a lot of the guilt and fear I felt had gone as well. So many of the killers I empathized with were scared, afraid of dying, afraid of hurting people, afraid of getting caught, afraid of being crazy. It all slowly blended together until all I felt was the fear. I couldn't even tell that it wasn't me that was afraid."

"I imagine that it must have been challenging wading through all that."

Hannibal's voice was calm and even, his therapist-tone, and Will's mouth quirked slightly.

"I had the time," he quipped dryly. "And once I realized that it wasn't me that was feeling it, it became easier to shuck it all off. All the weight from Hoist and Hobbs and even Brickelson, all of it just fell away. I could breathe easier than I had in years. The only thing left behind was me.

"And I realized that I was just as dark as them," he whispered. "But my darkness isn't like theirs, or yours."

He turned his gaze back to the other man. "I'm not a predator like you are. I may enjoy it under the right circumstances, but I'm not meant to be you, Hannibal. I'm meant to be me."

Hannibal tilted his head slightly, his body otherwise still. "And what are you?"

Will shook his head. "I don't know yet." He ran a hand over his stomach idly. "I've been a bit busy."

"Understandable."

"I do know what I want though."

Hannibal's lips quirked slightly and he tipped his head again, silently encouraging Will to continue.

"I want a family. I want to not be alone any more."

Abigail stood between them, an unspoken accusation of what could have been if Hannibal had only let it be. The child within Will would have been their second daughter, an annoying little-sister to a dark-haired survivor they had saved and loved, each in their own way. What Abigail would have thought about the baby was unknown and, thanks to Hannibal, would always remain that way. It was a deep wound in Will's brain that bled constantly when he let it. Initially, Will thought it was a remainder from Hobbs, love and obsession for a golden ticket. But as the weeks rolled by and Will untangled himself from the last few killers in his mind, he realized that her loss was something completely his own.

He could only imagine how Hannibal felt, having to live with the knowledge that he had destroyed what could have been the making of his own family when the man was already as lonely as he was.

Quiet whooshes from the gas fireplace filled the space between them and Will looked at Hannibal. "And I'm thinking you want the same," Will said challengingly.

Heat flared in red eyes briefly before banking down into a smoldering heat, restrained disappointment and anger stirring in its place. "You fled from me."

The accusation was clear and Will nodded. "I needed time to think. Your betrayal hurt, Hannibal, and I needed to know if my missing you was because you wanted me to miss you, or because I wanted me to."

"Did you miss me, Will, truly?"

Empathy had its advantages, Will thought, like knowing when your friend and baby-daddy needed hard evidence or there would be blood.

Will pointed at the side-board dresser. "Top drawer."

He watched as Hannibal found the phone and replaced the battery, turned it back on and scrolled through the texts and voicemails. It was impossible to miss the sheer number of them and Will knew Hannibal was convinced by the end. Hannibal powered the phone down and dismantled it, placing it back where it had been. He turned to look at Will appraisingly. “You're attempting to manipulate me."

The words held no malice or anger, just simple observation, and Will grinned slightly.

"‘Attempt’ would depend on if it's working or not."

The psychiatrist smirked briefly before crossing the room to stand beside Will, making the slighter male crane his head back to meet Hannibal's stare.

"May I?"

Most wouldn't have caught it but Will knew the man in front of him well enough to notice the hesitation, the uncertainty of his welcome, and Will nodded if only to assuage that horrible doubt. Hannibal Lecter was not a man meant to be unsure of himself.

Hannibal lowered himself onto his knees beside the chair, his eyes focused on Will's stomach. He stretched a large hand out and gently placed it on the center of the younger man's abdomen. Heat from his palm seeped through the thin shirt into Will's skin, and they both flinched at the intimacy of it. Red eyes glanced up once before studiously examining the belly in front of them. The hand slid upwards to Will's diaphragm and then down over the rounded shape of the baby, stopping when the appendage cupped the heavy weight of the child nestled in Will's body.

Will felt a faint flutter in reply and carefully reached for the other's hand, moving it into place, and pressed two of the fingers over the spot of movement. He felt his chest heat at the faint look of amazement in Hannibal's countenance and pressed the fingers deeper, causing the baby to punch at the offending digits in retaliation. The doctor grunted in surprise but a small genuine smile tipped his lips upward.

"He has your manners."

Will chuckled. "She... and she doesn't like being inconvenienced, like someone else I know."

Hannibal stilled again before running the tip of his pointer finger over the moving bulge under Will's shirt. "She?"

He hummed in agreement. "BG... baby-girl."

"You haven't named her then?"

"No. I couldn't think of any good ones. Everything seemed too common, too tasteless."

Hannibal nodded. "Perhaps it will come to you after the birth."

"Probably. Dad said they were originally going to name me something else but once I got there I looked like a Will, not a John."

"I was named after my father, who was named after his father. I'm the eighth Hannibal among a long line of Lecters."

"Right, so baby-naming is not a strength on either side, good to know."

Hannibal rolled his eyes.

_____

"God damn it," Will grumbled as he tried to push himself upright.

Dinner had been delivered and eaten, acceptable by even Hannibal's taste, and the doctor had cleared the plates, rinsing them in the sink before depositing them onto the cart they arrived on. He turned at Will's frustrated growl and smirked at the obvious trouble the younger man was having.

"It's not funny, Hannibal." Will glared and gave up his attempts at standing, sticking an arm out towards the other man.

Hannibal raised an eyebrow. "I'm sorry Will, but what is it that you need?"

Will snarled, his temper completely shot. "If you don't help me up I swear to God I'll name this kid Jane, or Mary. Do you want that Hannibal?"

Threat delivered, Will watched with a smirk as the psychiatrist narrowed his eyes and walked over to lever the heavier man up. Will's head spun momentarily from the quick change in position and he grabbed Hannibal's biceps to steady himself. Hannibal gripped Will's arm tighter and held on till the younger man nodded, and, together, they slowly walked into the bedroom, Winston padding along behind them.

Hannibal ran his eyes over the decor and furniture, not commenting on the glaring clash against Will's personality. He guided Will to the bathroom door and left the pregnant male to his own devices, most likely slinking off to snoop through the empath's things unimpeded. Will sighed in annoyance but finished his nightly routine before he shuffled to the dresser on the opposite side of the bed where he kept his pajamas.

Will leaned back against the elevated mattress, his hand bracing his descent onto the soft mattress top, and kicked off his pants. He had forgotten the grabber Carole had purchased for him and so he spent his time trying to contort his torso to get a foot into soft and worn sweatpants. He couldn't bend efficiently enough, and the battle waged on for several minutes until he hissed in frustration, chucked the offending garment against the window and fell backwards on the bed. He pressed his forearm against his stinging eyes and bit his lip to stop the impending crying-fit he felt coming.

He heard footsteps padding into the room and a slight chuckle, and it made Will bite his lip harder when it quivered. Tears leaked out of his eyes and Will sucked in a harsh gasp as a whimper built in his mouth. He thinned his lips to keep it from escaping but knew he failed.

Hannibal must have realized how close Will was to actually crying because he collected the sweat pants from their crumpled heap on the floor and knelt down at Will's feet. He slid the pants up Will's legs and helped the man to stand so he could pull them the rest of the way on. They rested at his lower back and dipped under his stomach, just above his groin. Will let the other unbutton his shirt and drop it in the clothes bin with the pants he had chucked off.

Will tugged at the covers blindly, pulling them down so he could carefully roll 360 degrees towards the pillows, his belly hanging off the side of the bed. Once he was resting on his back again, he fumbled for the step stool that was under the wooden frame with his foot. It slid out and he used it to lever himself up and into the bed. The mattress molded to his back, and Will closed his eyes with a sigh of contentment as the aches began to disappear.

Several minutes later, as he was almost asleep, he felt the mattress dip beside him and automatically snapped his fingers in rapid succession, his pointer finger aimed at the door. "No. Out."

"There is only one bed," Hannibal pointed out reasonably.

Will had his number though and snapped again rudely. "The couch is a sleeper."

Hannibal sighed. "Will..."

"You're not sleeping in my bed with Alana sleeping in yours."

The older man went quiet and Will could feel the stare. He ignored the man's baleful look and stretched as best he could with the heavy weight of his stomach pinning him down against the mattress. He felt Hannibal's weight disappear and assumed that was the end of it until he heard familiar beeping of a phone.

"Alana? Yes, I'm sorry about that but something else has come up. No, I'm afraid not. Alana, I don't think we should continue in this relationship..."

Clothing rustled as Hannibal shifted stance. "Because my priorities have suddenly changed. No, I'm afraid not. Because this isn't something that is discussable. We're better as friends my dear, and I think you know that as well. I know. I'm sorry. Yes, alright. Good night."

Hannibal hung up and Will opened his eyes to look at the older man. "That was quite possibly the most civil breakup in the history of breakups. I hate you."

The doctor smiled and placed his phone on the nightstand, motioning for Will to move over. Will glared but did as he was bid, grumbling as he inched his way towards the far side of the bed. Hannibal climbed in after him and rested on his side, facing Will, his head propped up on one hand. His bangs fell down sideways, highlighting his eyes, and Will had the urge to gouge them out in irritation.

"What?" Will asked defensively at the enigmatic smile on the other's face.

Hannibal's smile widened, thin lips stretched, but he shook his head, remaining silent as he watched Will.

"Oh god, you're one of those people."

"Which people?" the doctor inquired good-naturedly.

"The ones that like to watch their partner sleep. It's fucking creepy, Hannibal. Stop it."

The older male chuckled. "Are we partners? That's awfully quick."

Will scowled. "It's what you want."

He wasn't asking and it made Hannibal frown in thought.

"How long have you known?"

"Since before I got out of prison. I didn't understand exactly, but I knew you wanted a friend, a companion. I realized what you were specifically after a couple months ago."

"It doesn't seem to bother you."

Hannibal's hand twitched when the baby's foot appeared, pushing at her confines, and Will sighed but grabbed the man's hand to place it on the moving bulge. Hannibal pressed it lightly and twitched his lips when the baby punched back. Will closed his eyes and thought about his answer.

"Neither one of us are sexual creatures, Hannibal. We'll use sex, but it would be just as easy to remain celibate as it would to have a sexual relationship."

Will continued on. "You were only using Alana. For a cover and for information now that Jack's shut out of the Ripper case. Sex was an expected facet with her, so you complied. I don't know why we slept with each other, but I'm pretty sure that neither one of us walked away from that encounter with a new appreciation for the human-race's sexual drive. It doesn't mean I didn't like it, I just don't care if it happens again or not."

Hannibal hummed in agreement, his fingers spreading out to cover Will's belly. He pressed each finger down one at a time and smiled as the baby pushed them up. Will rolled his eyes at the game, already knowing the kid was going to be frightfully intelligent. How could she not with them as her genetic donors? They lapsed into companionable silence for a while, the doctor examining the baby's abilities as best he could with the limited access he had.

Will sighed and looked at the ceiling. "As long as you stop trying to drive me insane and turning me into a killer, we'll get along fine."

The older man gazed at him, his eyes dark with thought.

"Don't Hannibal," Will argued. "I can't do that again. Don't expect me to go through your games and tests and stay by your side. I've managed to patch my mind up as best I can, but you can tear it all down with just a few words. I can either raise a baby or bend under your pressure. I can't do both. And I'm telling you right now Hannibal, I have no intention of giving up my only chance at a family without a fight."

Will closed his eyes. "You're going to have to decide what's more important: a companion or an experiment."

Hannibal remained silent, watching Will in the dark. He ran a finger over the moving bulge of the baby's foot before lifting his hand to gently grip the younger man's throat. The large appendage dwarfed the slim column of flesh, strong digits pressing lightly against an artery. The threat was clear, though half-hearted, but Will chose not to take it seriously. He tilted his head to grant the other better access and felt the palm cup his adams apple, the heat from Hannibal's hand warming him.

"You are ever the temptation, dear Will," Hannibal murmured.

Will slid a hand over the one on his neck and the other rose to cup a sharp cheekbone that hovered above him. He pressed the pad of his thumb into the soft skin covering the bone under an eye, feeling the muscles underneath give slightly from the pressure. The thumb let up and stroked the spot it had abused the second before, a parody of a lover's caress.

"I mean it Hannibal," he said softly as he turned his hand to run his knuckles over the older man's cheek. "I'm willing to choose you, but you need to compromise."

"And what would that entail?" the other asked neutrally.

"You want someone who can see you." Will cupped Hannibal's cheek again. "Well, I see the monsters that swim in your eyes, Hannibal, and I'm not looking away."

Hannibal inhaled sharply and Will pressed on.

"I see you. I know you."

"But," the other man whispered, licking his lips.

Will slid his hand upwards until it tangled in the surgeon's blond locks. "But you need to trust me enough to stay on my own. I won't be a prisoner and I won't be a pet in a gilded cage. I'm not going to let you warp my mind again so it suits you. I need to figure this out on my own, and I need you to let me. And I need you to do the same for this baby."

Both men remained motionless after the slighter man's quiet declaration, silent in the dark until Hannibal's hand moved from Will's throat to cup a pale cheek. The psychiatrist leaned down and pressed his forehead to Will's, his eyes slipping closed as his lips pulled into a soft smile.

"I can try," he said eventually.

"That's all I'm asking." Will slid his hand through Hannibal's hair, pushing the man's bangs backwards until they escaped and fell down messily in front of eyelids. "I'm not saying you can't help, but I need you to not push me in one direction or the other. You can walk beside me, but not in front or behind."

Hannibal sighed, the soft exhale brushing against Will's lips as he opened his eyes. "There are ways of steering from the side as well."

Will chuckled, "I trust you to control yourself."

BG kicked once, a sharp stab to his insides, and Will grunted and closed his eyes tiredly. He automatically reached for where she lay to massage her into submission but Hannibal's hand made contact before his. He opened his eyes and stared at where the Doctor's long fingers touched his exposed belly, gently pressing at the baby's body.

"Is my presence affecting her?" the psychiatrist asked.

The empath shook his head and grimaced as BG kicked inwards again. "She tends to stay awake at night. Ow. I'm pretty sure my kidney's bruised."

Hannibal pressed down where Will thought BG's head was.

"One doesn't kick their parents for amusement, little one," Hannibal said with a small smile. "That is exceedingly rude, and we are better than that."

Maroon eyes glinted in the dark and the younger man sighed as he rested back into the pillows. While most would have been too terrified to sleep, knowing just whose presence they were in, Will relaxed completely. The other male wouldn't hurt him, that he was sure of. Hannibal was possibly the most dangerous predator there was, but he was Will's predator now, hard won but almost impossible to lose once acquired.

Will fell asleep to long fingers stroking his belly and the murmurs of a foreign tongue lilting up into his ears.

Morning came, and with it the sound of the alarm clock and an unfamiliar warmth on his right side. While the former was uncommon these days, Will allowing himself to sleep in now that his insomnia had abated, the latter was almost unheard of. The empath couldn't remember the last time someone had slept in the same bed as him, and that included the few times intercourse had occurred. Will forced his eyes open, turning his body towards the heat, and stilled when his blurry gaze landed on the source.

Hannibal was on his back, in the middle of shutting off the alarm clock. His upper body was twisted away from Will and afforded the younger man a silent observation of lean, compact muscles rippling under smooth skin. Strong, broad shoulders stretched as long fingers gently

depressed the 'off' button, quieting the beeping alarm, before the entire process reversed itself. Red eyes caught blue as the psychiatrist began to lay back down and Hannibal adapted his motion to complete a half-turn, coming to rest on his other side so he could face Will.

"Good morning, dear Will," Hannibal said pleasantly.

Will yawned, his mouth stretched uncomfortably and his eyes closed, before he smiled tiredly at the older man.

"Morning," he replied, his voice cracking with remnants of sleep. "Time's it?"

"A quarter past seven."

Will nodded and let his eyes slip closed, contemplating whether he should try to get some more sleep or not.

"Do you normally get up this early? I assume you have no pressing matters."

The empath shook his head, making his pillow crinkle softly. "No. Only when I'm having breakfast with Celeste."

The other man was quiet and Will opened his eyes, knowing what he'd see when he glanced at Hannibal. The expertly veiled annoyance would be undetectable to anyone who was ignorant of what to look for, but Will had the knowledge needed to understand. He gave one short, frustrated sigh.

"You agreed to play nice, Hannibal," Will chided.

"You did not specify terms," Hannibal pointed out.

Will sighed again before concentrating his entire attention on the killer in front of him. His lips thinned and his eyes hardened in seriousness. It had an interesting effect on the other man, making Hannibal straighten slightly and his gaze focus sharply in return.

"Listen to me Hannibal," Will started in a no-nonsense tone. "Celeste is important to me. I won't put up with you taking her away from me."

Like you did Abigail.

It was unspoken but Hannibal heard it anyway, as he usually did with the unsaid things. They both knew Abigail was a sensitive topic, a primed bomb suspended between them that required delicate maneuvering to avoid missing limbs. One ill-placed jab and it would obliterate everything in its wake. Hannibal proved his adeptness and carefully stepped around the explosive anger aimed toward him.

"I wouldn't dream of it," he placated.

Will snorted, an ugly sound. "Yes, you would."

Hannibal smirked slightly but kept his tongue, knowing Will had more to say.

"She's the closest thing this baby will have to a grandparent, and I won't have you ruining it because you don't like sharing."

It was a heavy confession on the empath's part, acknowledging how deeply he cared for the older woman in such a roundabout way. And he did care. Celeste quickly slipped through the prickly thorn-patch that was Will's defenses, carving a place for herself in his affections. Few individuals tried to get close to Will, most gave up after first blood was drawn by the razor sharp barbs.

And what did it say about Will that every one of those that succeeded besides his father and Beverly were killers?

Hannibal, for all the tact he possessed, ignored Will's subtle 'back off' and frowned thoughtfully. He reached over and cupped Will's cheek with a large palm, sliding his body forward until his stomach nearly touched the pregnant belly in front of him.

"Who does this child need besides us?" Hannibal asked.

Will shook the hand away from his face and pushed on the other's chest until Hannibal backed away an inch or two.

"She'll be better, elevated. What use will she have for them?" Hannibal pressed.

It was clear that Hannibal simply didn't understand, and Will felt his frustration with the other man rise. The doctor was a genius, but for all his intelligence he simply couldn't understand wanting friends. At least not in the normal fashion, Will thought ruefully.

"Hannibal," Will spoke slowly, trying to make the older man understand. "She's going to want friends, playmates. You and I aren't going to be enough for her."

Hannibal frowned slightly, clearly not happy with the direction the conversation was taking. Will took the advantage of the silence provided by the other's momentary contemplation and pressed on, using his understanding of the killer's innate protective streak to guide him.

"Besides, isn't it a good thing to have people care about BG? It's harder to cast doubt on someone when everyone loves them."

Hannibal's eyes glinted in dawning comprehension and Will felt a slight chunk of the burden on his shoulders fall away. The younger man rested his left hand on his stomach and began to rub circles into the skin.

"We need to be smart about this Hannibal," Will cautioned. "People are going to wonder who the other father is, and any answer is going to cause an uproar. Most people will think it happened in the prison. If it gets out that it happened before that, it won't take a genius to figure out your involvement. You could lose your license."

Hannibal shook his head and smiled at Will. "I appreciate your worry on my part, but it is not necessary. It is a very grey area. As I was never your official therapist, at most, I would receive a slap to the wrist."

Will bit his lip in thought. "Still, it would be better if we had as many people in our corner as possible. Celeste has influence."

"Money," Hannibal translated.

"Yes," the empath nodded. "She's smart and loyal and has the means to protect us."

It was clear Hannibal understood that he was not included in the 'us' and approved of the pregnant male's sense of self-preservation and protection of their child. The man's eyes darkened and the smile turned sharp as the hand Will knocked away earlier returned to cup Will's cheek.

"You are truly breathtaking, dear Will, and I find myself continuously grateful for stilling my hand."

"So you were going to kill me," Will mused.

Hannibal's smile dimmed somewhat and a slightly apologetic expression took its place. It made Will huff in irritation and push at the other's bare shoulder.

"Stop it," he sighed out in frustration.

The hand on his cheek stilled and Will watched the apology and contentment melt from the psychiatrist's face, leaving a blank expression and deep pits of red behind. It was a startling transformation and left Will off-kilter.

After several long moments of study, Will slowly lifted a trembling hand and ran the tips of his fingers over Hannibal's brow and nose, down to his cheeks and then over his lips. Hannibal allowed the touch with the same bland look that never faltered under the empath's attention. Finally, Will reached up and tangled his hand with the strong one splayed over his cheek, pulling the hand down between them. Blue eyes locked with maroon and Will smiled, a slight thing that cracked the other man's stoic expression and twitched the thin lips across from Will into a small but warm curve.

"Thank you," Will breathed.

Hannibal shook his head. "It's I that should be thankful. Very few realize there is more to me, and even fewer still truly wish to see it."

"And how many have actually seen it?"

"None but you live. They saw me under a scalpel's point and cried mercy."

"Not even your therapist?"

The older man's smile turned into a smirk. "She knows it exists but is wise enough to not seek it."

"Am I foolish then, Hannibal?"

Hannibal shook his head and lifted their conjoined hands to press his lips to Will's fingers. It was a romantic motion, one obviously practiced on others, but Will simply felt his connection with Hannibal thrum pleasantly. His body didn't react the way a lover's would, or should, but it didn't seem to bother either of them.

"No, Will. The people on this planet, they are pigs, art if they are lucky. You? You are a god."

The second alarm blared at eight and Will groaned as he began the arduous process of getting out of bed. At almost nine months pregnant it was an exceedingly difficult thing to do, his middle was weighed down by the baby and every movement had to be slow and thought-out to avoid injury. He glared at the door to the living room, knowing Hannibal was listening to him move about but content to wait for him to cave before offering assistance.

Will scooted closer to the edge of the mattress so he could pull himself the rest of the way. He ducked his head over the side to verify the step ladder was where it needed to be, silently grateful the doctor wasn't so much of a bastard as to move it, and then carefully swung his legs over the side. He lined them up with the top of the wooden stool and then very carefully slid off the mattress and onto the steps.

Getting dressed took even longer, his belly preventing most actions that required him to bend at the waist. He managed to pull a pair of trousers on with the aide of the handy-grabber Carole had gotten for him a few days prior, and he made a triumphant expression at the closed door when they were finally tied closed. Will shrugged on a loose-fitting sweater, quickly ran a hand through his curls, and slowly made his way out into the living room. He opened the door and moved towards his chair, gripping the walls and furniture for support as he did so.

Hannibal was sitting on the couch, dressed in what was casual-wear for him and reading something that Will could tell was in French. Winston was splayed out on the ground at the doctor's feet, panting contentedly. Will rolled his eyes at the sight and exhaled in relief as he reached the plush chair he had made his second home. It took some maneuvering but Will turned and attempted to lower himself down into the mound of cushions waiting for him.

The psychiatrist looked up after a particularly loud grunt of annoyance and raised an eyebrow at Will's futile attempts of sitting. He marked the page he was on with a finger and turned his attention onto Will, the empath still standing despite his efforts to be otherwise.

"Having difficulties, Will?"

Will's scowl was fierce, his lips thin as they struggled to hold back the vitriol he wanted to spew at the older man. It only increased as the other chuckled about the growing difficulties

Will was having with gravity. Things were proving difficult and Will had to breathe deeply in order to keep his hair-fine trigger intact.

"No, that's alright. Don't help. I'm fine," he grumbled angrily.

"If you are in need of assistance, you merely need to ask," Hannibal pointed out.

"I shouldn't have to ask!" Will snapped nastily, the psychiatrist's comment breaking the last of his patience.

Hannibal's eyes narrowed in irritation before he let out a long exhale, obviously gathering his patience. He raked his gaze over Will's form and fully observed the difficulties the empath was having with the simple task of sitting. It apparently swayed the man's pity because the doctor marked his page with a strip of ribbon and set the book aside, standing in a smooth motion in order to help.

Will was in the middle of another attempt when one of his trembling appendages collapsed, sliding off the chair's arm in a violent motion that carried him sideways. He gave a startled shout as he began to fall backwards, unable to stop the problematic descent, but came to an abrupt halt when Hannibal appeared beside him and quickly slipped a forearm around Will's front, the other arm braced on the chair's back.

There was a long moment of panic-filled silence where Will's panting was the only thing that passed between them. Will gripped the other man's shoulders and heaved a sigh of relief, blue eyes fluttering closed. Hannibal tightened his grip and helped lower Will the rest of the way down, Will shifting his left hand backwards to blindly reach for the chair's arm.

"You should be more careful," Hannibal admonished, his cheek brushing against Will's hair.

Will bit his tongue before responding. "I am. It's just getting harder to do everything."

"Then you should be in bed."

The comment irked so Will sent a half-hearted glare at the other.

"I'd go crazy. Besides, I need to be upright during the day or I have trouble breathing. I always slip down when I'm in bed."

Hannibal nodded, a practiced movement that spoke of humoring more than anything else. It made Will snort. The older man raised his eyebrow again but said nothing as he reached down to rearrange a pillow behind the pregnant male.

"What time is your friend arriving?" Hannibal asked pleasantly.

"If she comes, it'll be about nine." Will shot Hannibal a measured look. "You will be nice, won't you Hannibal?"

"I am always polite," Hannibal countered.

"That's not what I asked."

Hannibal stared down at Will with a blank expression before he sighed and nodded. "Because it means this much to you, I will reserve judgement until I have met her."

Will let out the breathe he had been holding and gave the man towering over him a blinding smile. "Thank you," he said gratefully.

Hannibal gave a jerk of his head before reclaiming his spot on the couch, forgoing the book in order to watch Will. It should have been disconcerting but Will found it comforting more than anything else. They sat quietly until there was a solid knock on the suite door. Hannibal rose to answer it but stilled as Will waved a hand at him.

"Who is it?" he called out.

"Who do you think, young man?" came the falsely snappish reply. "Now let me in, I'm starving."

Will grinned in response. "Come in!"

He shot Hannibal a quick look and saw the disapproving frown on his face.

"She doesn't like to be surprised by strangers," he explained quietly as the door was unlocked.

Hannibal accepted the explanation and stepped to Will's right, behind the far side of the chair, so he was clearly visible from the door, his hand placed on Will's shoulder. Will appreciated the thoughtful action, even though it was more so the doctor could get a look at the entering guest than to appease Celeste. It gave Will the perfect advantage to see the lightning-fast surprise that flitted across the chiseled features before the psychiatrist clamped down on it.

"Morning, Celeste," Will called out.

Celeste strode down the hallway briskly, her gaze locked onto Hannibal, before she gave Will a warm smile. She stepped up to the other side of Will's chair and ran a hand over the empath's messy curls. The blatant familiarity seemed to both appease and irritate Hannibal at the same time, much to Will's amusement.

"Good morning, Will," she said affectionately as she glanced up at Hannibal. "Hello again."

Hannibal tipped his head. "Good morning."

Will turned his head from one guest to the other, his grin widening until it split his face. "No blood. That's good. Celeste, Hannibal Lecter. Hannibal, this is Celeste Lambert."

"I've had the honor of making Mrs. Lambert's acquaintance once before. Serse, wasn't it?"

Celeste's smile widened. "Don't you have the memory, remembering something like that at the drop of a hat."

Hannibal shook his head. "It is only polite to remember individuals."

The hotel owner nodded firmly. "Yes, nowadays most people only remember the rude ones."

Her tone was innocent enough but both men caught the veiled message. Hannibal tensed, and Will shot a hand out to grab Hannibal's that was in the middle of lifting off his shoulder to attack. He squeezed hard, willing the other to relax, and breathed a sigh of relief when Hannibal finally eased back from Celeste and twisted his hand in Will's to intertwine their fingers as best he could.

"Yes," Hannibal murmured thoughtfully. "The rude ones do seem to be the most memorable. I, for one, prefer to put them out of my mind and focus on those that are truly important."

Hannibal squeezed Will's hand briefly and Will shot him a sincere smile. Celeste caught the small display and nodded her head in approval. Her smile fell slightly, becoming something softer, her eyes warming as she focused on Hannibal.

"As it should be," she said plainly.

She padded into the kitchen and picked up the phone, dialing the front desk to order breakfast.

"The same, Will?" she asked over her shoulder.

"Yes, please."

"And you, dear?" Celeste twisted around to look at Hannibal. "My chefs can make pretty much anything."

"Scrambled eggs and toast will suffice."

Celeste scoffed. "Absolutely not. How about duck eggs and blood-sausage? Will says you enjoy haute cuisine."

Hannibal hesitated, clearly surprised that Will had mentioned him at all let alone his food preferences, but nodded. "That sounds lovely, thank you."

Celeste smiled before glancing at Will. "You'll be fine with that?"

Will took stock of his stomach before nodding. "It should be fine."

"Good." She turned back to the phone and spoke to the person on the other end, placing their breakfast order with succinct precision.

Will waited until she was occupied before letting go of Hannibal's hand. "Celeste stole her cooks from fancy restaurants."

Hannibal ignored the other empty armchair and moved around Will to grab the desk chair, situating it beside Will's. He sat down gracefully and watched the older woman with a contemplative expression, something the younger man wasn't sure was good or bad. Will reached out and carefully laid a hand on the psychiatrist's arm and Hannibal glanced at him quickly before giving him a reassuring smile.

"It's fine, Will."

Will wasn't sure he believed that but was willing to let it go until he and Hannibal could talk, preferably before the doctor got Celeste alone. Celeste hung up and returned to the living room to take the empty chair on Will's other side.

"Would you care for tea, Mrs. Lambert?" Hannibal asked politely.

"Well aren't you charming," Celeste complimented, glancing at Will briefly before nodding. "Yes, please. There's tea above the stove. I take mine with two sugars and some milk but Will takes his black, extra-strength."

The psychiatrist set off into the kitchen to start the electric kettle and opened the cupboards over the stove to pull down the tea leaves Celeste stocked for Will. With the doctor busy, Celeste caught Will's eyes and held his gaze. Her expression was deadly serious and Will knew that if he so wished it, regardless of how capable the man was, Hannibal would most likely be leaving the hotel injured. If at all.

Will smiled.

Celeste relaxed slightly and some of the tension faded from her posture and face. She nodded in silent acceptance of Will's decision but still made it clear that she'd be watching. Will subtly reached over to pat her hand, hiding the movement from where Hannibal stood in the Kitchen, listening for any talk between them. Celeste knew what Hannibal was doing as well and leaned over conspiratorially.

"So," she whispered, just loud enough for Hannibal to hear and pretend not to. "That's your gentleman, hm?"

"Celeste," Will chided, embarrassment bleeding into his tone. "Please."

"I'm just making small talk dear," she said sweetly.

"No. You're prying."

"Well, maybe just a little." Celeste chuckled. "But how can I not when he's practically all you think about. You said he was good looking. I think you may be going blind if that's only good looking."

"Celeste," Will mumbled in feigned discomfort.

"I'm just saying, after meeting him, I'm not surprised you're in the family way. The man's a stud."

"Celeste!"

The horror Will projected at the older woman was only half faked. He quickly glanced at Hannibal to make sure the man was still pretending to be ignorant, and leaned closer to the woman.

"Stop it," he hissed. "You're not drunk are you? You've never acted like this."

Celeste patted Will's hand. "I'm only trying to see how attached you are to him. I don't want you getting hurt if he's not serious about this."

Will sighed tiredly. "It's not like that, Celeste."

"I think it is," the woman countered. "I've heard you the times you brought yourself to talk about him. It's in your tone, and your smile is a little bit brighter."

"We're just friends."

She gave a meaningful look at Will's belly. "With benefits, clearly."

Will covered his face with hand a took a deep breath. When he didn't feel as strained, he gave the woman beside him a hard look.

"Alright, it may be like that. But Hannibal's a decent sort and he cares."

"Of that I have no doubt," Celeste nodded. "He wouldn't have stopped himself for anythings less."

They both lapsed into silence after that, Will thinking over the reason for Celeste's baiting of Hannibal. It made sense, he thought, for Celeste to test Hannibal's control. She was still affected by her dead husband, so of course she would want to make sure the person positioning themselves as Will's significant other wasn't the wrong sort of monster for the empath.

"I only want to make sure you're taken care of by someone who deserves you."

Will gave Celeste a hesitant smile at the genuine comment from the woman, still awkward about the affection she had for him at times. He wasn't used to having a mother-figure that honestly cared about his well-being.

Celeste held Will's hand in her left and ran the other through his curls once before cupping his cheek. "You can be yourself around him."

It wasn't a question but Will answered anyway. "Yeah," he murmured shyly, glancing at Hannibal as the man poured hot tea into cups.

"Then that's all I really need to know. If he's what you need then I'll do whatever's in my power to make sure you keep him. No silly review board would ever come out on top."

Will sighed in relief, worry he hadn't realized he was carrying fading at the woman's words. "Thank you."

"Think nothing of it. Now, tell me, quick, is his rump as delicious as it looks?"

"Celeste!" Will sputtered loudly in admonishment, his bright flush sending the woman into peals of laughter.

Hannibal carried a tray of cups into the living room and glanced curiously at the laughing woman before he sat the tray down on the coffee table. It was clear he was still pretending ignorance of their conversation as he handed Will his cup and waited patiently until Celeste had gathered herself before passing the hotel-owner her own drink as well.

"Oh, oh, I'm so sorry," she gasped out as she straightened and cleared her throat. "I'm afraid I couldn't resist."

"Try harder next time," Will grumbled.

Her eyes twinkled mischievously before she sobered and turned to include Hannibal in their conversation. "So, Doctor Lecter I know a few things about you from both our brief encounter at the opera and also from Will."

She took a sip from her cup. "You're a psychiatrist in Baltimore, a well-respected man of your field and others. You're serious with a dry sense of humor and have a passion for cooking. What other qualifications do you possess?"

Will shook his head in reluctant bemusement and stared at the woman. "You can't be serious. Celeste, this isn't twenty questions."

"Quite right," she nodded at Will before turning back to Hannibal. "It's the dating game."

The empath groaned but Hannibal chuckled good-naturedly.

"It is a fair question, dear Will." Hannibal said appeasingly. "I was a medical surgeon before I became a psychiatrist and am originally from Lithuania. Many of my peers have described me as distant and I would agree. I'm careful in who I give my affections, as a friend or more."

"And you like throwing dinner parties."

"Yes. It was a terrible shame you couldn't make it. It was a splendid night."

Celeste tipped her head. "I truly am sorry about that."

"Not to worry. I completely understand the need to unwind in the comfort of your own home. Sometimes you simply need to be by yourself."

"Perhaps if you decide to host another."

"You will be the first I invite, after Will of course."

Will shook his head instinctively, knowing full-well how torturous it would be being surrounded by the upperclass of Baltimore. He'd hate it and wouldn't be able to prevent his ire from seeping out. Hannibal ignored Will's distress.

Celeste smiled. "Perfect. You might need to serve something Will would recognize though. It might cut down on his hatred of such things."

Hannibal cocked an eyebrow in contemplation. "You may be right. What dish would you suggest?"

"Rump roast? Nice and meaty, something you can sink your teeth into."

Will choked on thin air and stared at Celeste in horror as his face turned bright red from both the fit and the woman's words. Any retort from Hannibal was diverted by a knock on the front door and Celeste patted Will's hand and stood to retrieve the food cart from the butler in the hall.

"Have a sip of tea, dear."

Celeste was due to make a lunch appearance at some charity function and begged off around ten-thirty to get ready for it. So with a long-suffering sigh she kissed Will's cheek and, much to both men's surprise, Hannibal's as well, before brushing wrinkles out of her suit. The regal matron patted Hannibal's cheek and waggled a finger in his face affectionately.

"Don't you be a stranger, Doctor Lecter. As long as you're welcomed by Will, you may consider Edgemoore a home away from home. Remember that."

After seeing the woman out, Hannibal returned to the sitting room with a bemused expression on his face. Will watched him as he sat down in the chair recently vacated by the bed and breakfast owner and raised an eyebrow when the look didn't fade as he expected it to.

"Well?" he asked the other.

Hannibal pursed his lips and stared out the balcony window, his voice faraway as he responded. "I may have to reconsider my position."

Will smiled widely, pleased that Hannibal had conceded his opinion. "She's great, isn't she?"

"She is interesting," Hannibal corrected mildly. "She knew from the beginning what I am and yet welcomed me with open arms."

"Celeste lets a lot slide. She tends to ignore what others would condemn and looks for what really matters."

Hannibal slid his gaze from the outdoors to Will. "And what matters to her?"

Will bit his lip and shrugged, uncomfortable. "How they'll benefit her."

The doctor nodded, as if that confirmed something for him. "She shows sociopathic tendencies, however is not one. A trait adapted for survival. Curious."

A response welled up on Will tongue but the empath bit it down. They were bordering on confidences, and Will was reluctant to break the one he shared with Celeste.

Hannibal seemed to realize that and changed to topic. "I take if from her parting comment that you intend to stay after the birth."

Will nodded. "I like it here. It's quiet and no one bothers me. Besides, Celeste offered me one of the cottages further back once BG is born."

"I did not see any secondary housing on my way up to the hotel."

"They're hidden in the trees." Will reached over and picked up his cup, draining the last bit of tea before waving it at Hannibal.

Hannibal rolled his eyes, something he had obviously picked up from too much time spent with Will, and went to make more.

"I saw them before I got too big," Will called after the doctor. "They're mostly used for honeymooning; Edgemoore does a lot of weddings. There's three that would potentially work, but I'm going to wait another month or so before deciding. I don't want to feel pressured into choosing one just because BG's almost here."

"Tell me about them," Hannibal said over his shoulder, his hands busy with the kettle and tea leaves.

"Well," Will drawled as he sat back in his chair and ran a hand over his stomach, "there's two three-bedroom houses and then there's a two-bedroom. The two-bedroom and one of the three-bedrooms are closer to the tree line. You'll come across them as soon as you hit the forest. The other three-bedroom is further back, about half-way in, off to the side. That one's not rented often because of the cost."

Hannibal hummed and carried the tray with the kettle and tea leaves out to where they were sitting. He poured Will a fresh cup before preparing his own with graceful precision. "I would think you'd chose the last one. You do cherish your solitude."

"It's huge." Will sipped at his drink. "It was the original guest house when the property was built. There's tons of unused rooms. All the furniture I've every owned put together wouldn't fill it up. I'm pretty sure there's two libraries."

The older male made an 'go on' noise and Will obliged him.

"Let's see... Ground floor, there's a sitting room, a dinning room, a kitchen, you curve around the back of the house and on the other side heading towards the front there's a pantry and bathroom, a second parlor, and the library. Upstairs has the other library, two of the bedrooms, and a few empty rooms I have no idea about. I don't think they're bedrooms because there's no closets and Celeste usually keeps them locked."

"Many homes built last century did not have closets. Though, given the property and the function it served, they are most likely servant quarters or other sitting rooms. The last bedroom?"

"The entire third floor. It's renovated attic space, really beautiful. It's massive though."

Hannibal took a sip. "I would be interested in seeing it. I think it would suit the situation the best."

Will turned Hannibal's words over in his mind. "I was expecting to fight with you on this."

Hannibal shook his head. "I am a man of practicality, Will. While I do find myself quickly adjusting to our relationship's growth, I know perfectly well that it would not go well were either of us to give up our own home in favor of the other's. I require order and you favor warmth. I shudder at thinking of my house in such disarray and you would never feel at home in my house."

The reasoning was sound and Will nodded his acceptance of it. "What about BG?"

"She would, of course, remain with you. I will fully admit to you that I do not feel emotions in the same manner as most do. I love, but it is an obsessive love, destructive even as it drives me to protect. You are fully capable of providing our child with what I cannot, and I know I would be tempted to manipulate things far past what you would deem acceptable."

Hannibal continued on, untroubled by what he had just admitted. "Besides, it is not as if you are outside my reach. You are a mere half-hour journey from Baltimore, forty-five minutes in traffic. It is a far cry closer than Wolf Trap. I would not be absent from either of your lives. She would, of course, have her own room in my home for whenever you visit."

It was as much a threat as it was a promise but Will chose to accept it in the twisted spirit it was meant, reassurance of Hannibal's commitment. Long-term relationships were foreign beasts for both men so Will preferred to treat this as the next step of their codependent friendship.

"That presents a problem that we need to discuss," Will pointed out. He adjusted his position in the chair before continuing. "I've been missing for the past five months. How are we going to explain my reappearance? And what about the baby? People are going to talk, Hannibal."

Hannibal set his cup down and steepled his fingers, his elbows resting on the arms of his chair. He stared at Will, his gaze penetrating but contemplative.

"We could simply tell the truth."

Will raised an eyebrow. "The truth? Tell people you knocked me up, framed me for murder, and I've been hiding from you since I got out?"

"Not in those exact words," Hannibal mused lightly, mirth coloring his tone. "Perhaps that you were unsure of my reaction to your pregnancy and also felt yourself in danger from the Chesapeake Ripper so you decided to go into hiding."

Will pulled the simple explanation apart from multiple angles but eventually agreed that it could work as long as no one dug too deep. "What about my reappearance?"

"You decided to inform me over the phone of your pregnancy and we came across each other at your doctor's."

Again, a simple explanation that would work, especially since there was nothing false or missing about it.

"What are we going to do about the Ripper, Hannibal? Jack and Alana both know that I think it's you."

"Thought, dear Will," Hannibal corrected with a little smirk, his eyes glinting. "You thought it was me."

The psychiatrist took a sip from his tea and frowned gravely at Will. "Horrible business, really. The encephalitis made you see the right paths but the wrong connections."

Will thought about the other man's cryptic words for several long moments before understanding hit him and he smiled viciously. "Chilton. Please say you're implying Chilton."

Hannibal tipped his head, a little smile curving his lips, and Will laughed gayly.

"Oh, oh, this is perfect," he crowed.

Hannibal motioned for the empath's cup and refilled it before leaning back in his chair and ran a finger over his lips. "He is the logical choice for the Ripper: a surgeon, an egoist, an interest in the case - in you."

Will nodded. "That, of course, explains why he framed me. He wanted me under his control. He knew about the encephalitis somehow and wanted to study it."

"Shameful," Hannibal tutted. "Absolutely shameful that a medical professional would allow another human being to suffer like that."

The empath shot Hannibal a withering look, still upset that Hannibal had allowed Will's mind to cook itself. He drummed his fingers irritably on his belly. "It also removed pressure off him when I was charged with the Ripper murders, no one would look any deeper. Now that I'm thinking about it, Chilton did experiment on me with psychic-driving. There's no way of really knowing what the encephalitis made me think and what Chilton forced on me."

Hannibal's lips thinned in false anger. "Of course you would go into hiding the moment you were free. Fredrick was above suspicion, no one would believe you if you told them the truth, especially Jack and Alana as you had already mistakenly pointed a finger at me. He would have been free to go after you without anyone the wiser."

Will hunched over and cradled his belly, his face pale and his shoulders tense as he forced as much remembered fear as he could into his voice. "I couldn't take the chance. I'm lucky as it is that the drugs he gave me didn't affect her. I wasn't going to put her in danger by staying out in the open where he could get to me."

A dry hand covered one of his own and squeezed, imbuing comfort and support. Will glanced up at Hannibal's concerned expression and gave the man a hesitant smile. His playacting seemed to delight Hannibal, but the doctor quickly gathered himself and frowned.

"Once I learned of your condition, I redoubled my search for you. Even though it was serendipity that I found you as quickly as I did, it still took several days for you to open up about what had been done to you."

Will nodded. "You were furious and demanded we inform the FBI immediately."

"Of course I was angry. My friend was manipulated and experimented on and then both he and my child were put at further risk when they were handed over to the Chesapeake Ripper on a silver platter."

"I was lucky I got out before he knew about the baby. There was no telling what he would have done to me."

Will's last comment was heartfelt, complete truth and fear lacing the words, and Hannibal's eyes flashed in genuine anger, mirroring what Will still felt for the prison therapist. Both men knew that the other Psychiatrist would have jumped on the chance to study the effects of pregnancy on an empath, even if it was to the detriment of the patient and fetus. And while Hannibal may have done something similar to Will with the encephalitis, Will knew that this was different because the baby - the Chesapeake Ripper's child - had only escaped permanent damage because Will had been so terrified of the what-ifs that he'd been forced to free himself.

The empath knew Hannibal was possessive. While Hannibal was happy to ignore his moral obligation to get Will medical help, Will was pretty sure he had murdered Tobias Budge in cold-blood because he thought Budge had killed Will. It was a good thing, Will thought, for that possessiveness to grow and encompass the infant that shared both their genes. Because that meant that Will would have a way of manipulating Hannibal in return.

Hannibal was interested in the baby and it was only a matter of time before that interest grew to fondness. It would be so much simpler to sway Hannibal in one direction or the other if he had something else for the doctor to focus his obsessive, protective nature on. Their child was perfect for that. Who better to guard a baby mongoose than a besotted Cobra?

"What about evidence?"

Hannibal patted his hand and leaned back in his seat. "Leave that to me, I know just the thing."

Will nodded and readjusted himself again, shoving one pillow down and pulling another up so he didn't rest as far forward. Hannibal shifted the matching ottoman at his request, and Will sighed in relief as the building pressure in his chest lessened. He rubbed his stomach and closed his eyes.

"I'll be so glad when this is done, the last month has been horrible."

"You said Doctor Burnam extended your due date?"

"Hm," Will hummed distractedly. "Twice. She wanted to avoid as many premature-birth complications as possible. There's more risk when the parent's older."

Hannibal nodded. "Yes, though more so if the birth-parent is male. It was a wise decision."

"Doesn't mean I'm happy about it. I'm uncomfortable most of the time and I can't do anything."

"I'm sure," Hannibal said kindly. "However, while I'm sure you're going stir-crazy, I recommend not exposing yourself to cleaning products. It's not healthy for you if they spill in large amounts."

Will froze and slowly opened his eyes to stare at the other male. While he knew Hannibal could smell the lingering bleach in the kitchen, he hoped that that was all he smelled.

"Thank you for your concern," he said carefully, "but Celeste cleaned that mess up, not me. She made sure I was well out of the way."

Thin lips stretched and maroon eyes lit up as the man began to truly see how devoted Celeste was to Will.

"Really? I should thank her then, for her thoughtfulness."

Will nodded noncommittally, changing the subject. "Have you been keeping in touch with Jack and the bureau?"

Hannibal shook his head. "Jack hasn't approached me since he was pulled from the Ripper case, not even to accompany Bella to her sessions. And, if I understand correctly, the new case agent keeps himself apart from the others."

"I'm sure," Will drawled casually, his attention on the tea in his cup, "what with how dangerous the Ripper is. He killed a trainee FBI agent, one of the top of her class. I wouldn't be surprised if the agent in charge refused to consult with Jack or anyone previously associated with the case."

Hannibal observed Will thoughtfully. "I'm sure it has been difficult for the agent to acquaint himself with the case the same way Jack had."

"It's for the best," Will said simply, his pleased expression far more telling than his words. "Jack's obsession was putting everyone in danger. He was seeing the Ripper in every face but the one he should have."

"Yes, a shame he didn't spend more time on Chilton."

"But it's good though, a fresh set of eyes, a different perspective. Maybe this one will actually listen to me. You're right about Jack not believing me if I told him about Chilton."

"We'll just have to make sure the proof is there when the good agent goes knocking on Fredrick's door."

Will bit his lip and pressed down where BG was shifting inside him. "It would be more convincing if it was in the next few days or so, before the baby was born."

The logic was sound and Hannibal nodded before standing in one smooth motion. He cleaned their cups and stored the tea before pulling on his coat to depart. "I'll be gone for the rest of the day. There were some patients I couldn't reschedule and then I have a few errands to run. I should be back around seven though. Is there anything you need while I'm out?"

He shook his head. "No, I should be fine. If anything comes up I'll give the front desk a call."

It was after eight by the time Hannibal returned. The man slipped into the suite with a key he had conned from the front desk receptionist and had a larger bag than the one he had arrived with the night before. Will deduced it was clothing and waved it aside as unimportant, focusing instead on the man carrying it.

"You're in a good mood," Will commented.

Hannibal smiled as he removed his coat and hung it on the coatrack just inside the sitting room. "Would you not be, Will, if you were me? Not only have we reunited, but we will soon become three, possibly more. The tea cup is coming together, something smells delicious, and in a matter of days the Chesapeake Ripper will be apprehended."

Will caught the 'possibly more' and felt his chest heat in pleasure. Hannibal may not care about Celeste but he was willing to accept her if it made Will happy. It probably helped that she was most likely a killer as well. He kept quiet about it, not willing to risk the tentative formation of family occurring around him.

"You're sure about the Ripper?" he asked instead, remembering the list the doctor had just rattled off.

"Positive. Fredrick has been a very naughty boy."

Will snorted in disgust at the image Hannibal's comment provoked and saw the other man smirk in reciprocation. "Dinner's in the oven for you. I had them watch for your car and put it in when you turned on the drive."

Hannibal had removed his jacket and tie and was rolling up his sleeves when he stopped at the mention of being watched and thinned his lips in annoyance. Will knew the man was invested in his own freedom and didn't appreciate the surveillance. Will also knew he would have to get over it.

"Hannibal," he sighed, "just go get your food. I'd like to go to bed sometime soon."

The man forced his irritation at Will down and went to retrieve the meal from the oven, grabbing a towel on his way. He opened the door and Will watched him still for a second before he gently lifted the plate out. He set it on the counter and watched it with growing amazement, lips parted slightly in surprise.

"Will," he breathed, taking in the magnificently arranged lung and loin he had cooked for he and Will to share the night previously.

"It's important to you, Hannibal, I know that. I'm not taking part but I'm not stopping you either."

Hannibal looked over at Will in restrained warmth, his eyes glimmering and his hair falling down to cover his eyes. It was an attractive sight and while Will wasn't necessarily interested in sex, he did appreciate aesthetic beauty. The killer seemed so much more human in the kitchen, any kitchen, with his jacket off and sleeves up. Will liked seeing a human Hannibal.

Both men were quiet as Hannibal sat on one of the tall barstools that rested underneath the other side of the counter, usually unused, eating his people-food. The doctor rested one foot on the rung of the stool, his knee elevated above the other and an elbow on the counter, the fork in his fingers waving to a classical piece only Hannibal heard as he chewed, the other arm resting around the plate. It was raw domesticity on a level that had Will blinking back sudden and foolish tears. He quickly wiped them away, closed his eyes, and leaned his head back to wait for Hannibal to finish his meal.

"Will."

A hand was gently shaking him awake and he opened his eyes with a startled inhale. He looked around quickly before focusing on Hannibal standing beside him. Hannibal had already showered and changed for bed, his hair damp and his sleeping pants tied loosely around his hips.

"Come, Will. Let's get you into bed."

He let Hannibal help him up and leaned against the older male tiredly as they made their way into the bathroom and then to bed. Will leaned back on the mattress and Hannibal removed the empath's shirt and pants, slipping the sweatpants from the night before up and onto his hips. He pulled out the step stool and let Will maneuver himself into bed. After the younger man had stopped squirming, he turned off the lights and climbed in as well, resting on his back. It was silent for a long time before Will spoke softly into the room, sure that Hannibal was asleep.

"I missed you."

Will turned over, facing away from Hannibal, and didn't see the man laying next to him smirk fondly in return.

Chapter 3

While Hannibal had arranged adequate proof of Chilton's guilt Wednesday, they decided to wait until Friday to talk with the FBI agent in charge of the case. The morning of, Will sat in his chair, his feet propped up on the ottoman and a heavy blanket placed over his lap. He had thick circles under his eyes, giving the impression he was exhausted, which, to be fair, he was. BG had decided to spend the entire night rolling and kicking and nothing he or Hannibal did got her to stop. She had kept Will awake most of the night, allowing him a few minutes respite before starting up again.

Once Will ceded defeat around five am, Hannibal had called Alana to inquire about the contact information for the new agent in charge of the Chesapeake Ripper case. Alana, still reeling from the unexpected breakup, had been reluctant to give it but eventually gave in. The psychiatrist had called the man, Agent Bart Eckelson, to request a meeting, stating he had new information on the case. Eckelson had been understandably hesitant, knowing Hannibal had been a consultant for Jack and at one time a person of interest, but had agreed to come to Edgemoore after the doctor had assured the man he was not calling on behalf of Jack Crawford.

Once Eckelson entered the sitting room, Hannibal following closely behind, he hesitated before extending a hand for Will to shake. Will did so weakly, flinching slightly and avoiding eye contact with the man, firmly ensconced in his old persona.

"Mister Graham," Eckelson greeted. "People have been looking for you."

Will flinched again in guilt and Hannibal cleared his throat pointedly. "That, Agent Eckelson, is one of the reasons I asked you to come. It was very important we speak with you immediately."

Eckelson nodded, unsure of where the conversation was going but willing to listen. He stepped back from Will, giving the empath breathing space, and Will almost felt bad for deceiving the man.

"You said you had new information?"

"Yes," Hannibal answered as he motioned for the man to take a seat on the couch.

Eckelson sat and watched with an intelligent gaze as Hannibal took the seat next to Will. He took in Will's reluctance, his obvious pregnancy and the way he looked away from both men before he spoke up. "I'm thinking it's not Doctor Lecter with the information."

Hannibal shook his head. "I'm afraid not. I apologize for the ruse but I needed to get you here. Will has been reluctant to talk to anyone about this you see, afraid no one would believe him. I was also afraid that you would not come if you knew who it was that you were meeting."

Eckelson nodded again, still watching Will quietly. He leaned forward and set a recorder on the coffee table, the red light blinking into life as he turned the machine on.

"I can't begin to understand what you've gone through because of this case, but I am sorry you were put through it."

Will glanced at the agent before his eyes darted away again and he licked his lips. He opened his mouth but no sound emerged and so he closed it immediately and started to wring his hands in frustration. Hannibal reached over to gently stop the movement by placing one of his larger hands over Will's. Will looked at Hannibal in surprise before looking down at the appendage covering his. Hannibal squeezed his hands gently.

"It's alright Will," he soothed. "He's here and he's listening, but you need to tell him what you told me."

Will bit his lip harshly but nodded. "I'm sorry, it's just-"

"You don't need to apologize, Mister Graham," Eckelson said firmly. "It's clear you're upset about this. If you need to, we can reschedule."

The empath shook his head and glanced at the agent's tie. "I'm having a c-section next Thursday. I wanted to get this over with before the baby comes. I don't want to have to deal with this after that."

"Understandable." The FBI agent nodded his head towards Will's midriff. "Congratulations by the way."

Will rubbed the bulge his hands rested on and nodded his thanks. He took a deep breath and looked away from both men again, out to the balcony where Winston was shut away for the duration of the meeting.

"I was wrong," he started quietly, twisting his other hand up with Hannibal's, "when I said Hannibal was the Chesapeake Ripper."

Eckelson straightened, his demeanor hardening enough to tell both men he was listening. He didn't jump in when Will went quiet, choosing to wait until the empath gathered his thoughts and continued his explanation.

"I was sick. It made me unstable. I was seeing things, hearing things. I would see Hobbs standing over the bodies on each new case Jack dragged me to."

"That would be Garrett Jacob Hobbs?" the agent clarified for the record.

Will nodded, a sharp jerky motion. "Yes. Jack had me working the Ripper case any time there was downtime. He wanted progress so badly, and I just wanted him to leave me alone, I-"

He sucked in a shuddery breath and went silent, biting his lip harshly until Hannibal had to squeeze his hand.

"Will, you need to stop that. You're hurting yourself and that isn't productive to getting through this."

Will sighed but let his reddened lower lip go. He glanced at Hannibal before looking down at his stomach. He gathered his courage and looked up to meet Eckelson's gaze straight on.

"My brain was literally cooking itself. It was overcompensating for my empathy disorder and creating hallucinations related to the cases I was working on. I was seeing Hobbs because I killed him. I associated his death with all the other deaths I saw after that. Hannibal was helping me with the Shrike case and so he got lumped in with my psychosis.

"The hallucinations got worse as time wore on and when we made the connection that the Ripper was eating the organs he was taking, my brain linked the Ripper case with the Shrike case and melded them together. But because of the encephalitis, it wasn't perfect and certain parts didn't combine right. The Ripper had a surgical background, the clean cuts and dismemberments of the bodies told us so, but my mind was in distress and jumped track and focused on what it was familiar with."

Will went silent again and Eckelson filled in the blank. "Doctor Lecter, who was an emergency room surgeon."

Will sighed. "I locked onto Hannibal because all the pieces fit. It wasn't possible for me to see anyone else as a suspect after that. I deteriorated even further and ran off with Abigail to Minnesota."

Tears suddenly streamed down Will's throat and he swallowed roughly several times, blinking away the excess moisture that threatened to overflow from his eyes. The sorrow he portrayed for this portion of the story wasn't fake, it was very much real, and he struggled with the simple task of verbalizing the events.

"I... I had an episode and hallucinated. It scared Abigail and she ran away from me. I..." Will lost his composure and covered his eyes with a trembling hand as he sobbed out, "That was the last time I saw her."

Hannibal quickly stood and moved in front of Will, blocking the crying man from Eckelson's sight, and wrapped his arms around Will's shoulders. He held Will until the empath's emotions were under control again and discreetly palmed Will a handkerchief. Will wiped his eyes and nose before nodding that he was alright to continue.

"Sorry," he murmured thickly.

Eckelson waved the apology off. "I'm ready whenever you are," he said kindly.

Will nodded and played with the folded cloth in his hands. "I had a seizure, I think. I went to a therapist that put me under hypnosis after I was released and I remembered... I remember someone shoving something hard down my throat, a pipe or something. Lights were flashing and there was this loud noise all around me. I woke up and got sick in the sink and I saw-"

He couldn't continue and Hannibal looked to the FBI agent. "You don't need him to go over this again do you?"

Eckelson shook his head. "Absolutely not. I have it all on record. I only need what hasn't been brought forth. Whatever you can give me Mister Graham."

Will wiped his eyes again and nodded, looking at the agent's hands where they were linked over his spread knees. "In prison, Chilton experimented on me."

The reaction was immediate. Eckelson straightened and his expression darkened so quickly that even Hannibal had to be impressed at the speed. The agent sat forward and dipped his head so he could catch Will's eye.

"I need you to tell me everything, Mister Graham, as much as you can remember."

Will let out a shuddery breath. "He forced me to agree to a risky type of therapy. Psychic-Driving. He strapped me to a table, pumped me full of drugs, and pointed flashing lights in my face. I can't remember what he said, but I remember leaving each session feeling detached and nearly sick with fear."

"What were you afraid of?" Eckelson asked.

Will locked gazes with the doctor beside him, as if seeking an anchor in the chaos of his feigned emotions. "Hannibal. I was afraid of Hannibal."

Hannibal was frowning, anger licking away behind his eyes. He squeezed Will's hand and looked at the agent.

"That man," he started forcefully, surprising both Eckelson and Will with the barely-controlled rage, "abused a patient in his care, subjected him to an incredibly dangerous procedure that has been proven to be detrimental to a person's health, simply to study how it would effect Will's empathy. There is no telling what suggestions or triggers he implanted in Will's subconscious. What's worse is that in the process he willfully attempted to corrupt one of the only methods of stabilization Will had so he would be completely isolated."

Eckelson was scowling as well. "Did he do this to any other prisoners?"

Will looked back to Eckelson and nodded. "Before I was imprisoned... Alana Bloom, Hannibal and I suspected he did it to Abel Gideon. Gideon provided multiple statements to that effect, but they were all thrown out as inadmissible because he was deemed insane. He was sent back to Chilton's care."

Eckelson pulled a notepad out and jotted something down before closing it and placing it on the table. "Do you know what he did to Gideon?"

"He fed the personalities of several different killers into Gideon's psyche. His mind couldn't handle it and fractured under the strain. He literally thinks he's each one of these killers. He cycles through them, thinks like they would, acts like they would, but knows at the back of

his mind that nothing is right about it. He knows that something's wrong, but he's so far gone he can't be helped."

The next part was harder, requiring delicate maneuvering on Will's part. "Chilton liked to watch me. There were cameras installed in my cell and he'd watch me on and off. He'd watch me eat or sleep or even use the facilities."

Eckelson quickly prodded Will to continue, clearly believing he knew where the conversation was heading. "How do you know he'd watch you?"

"Matthew told me."

"That would be Matthew Brown, the orderly that attacked Doctor Lecter?"

Will nodded. "He had walked in on Chilton doing it, had even confronted him on it. After Chilton threatened to fire him, Matthew told me."

"Was this before or after he decided to attack Doctor Lecter?"

"Before. Matthew was nice to me. A little creepy maybe, but no one else was nice. They treated me like a monster."

"Brown became obsessed with you."

Will nodded again, a movement he was growing sick of. "He killed that person during my trial. Not the judge, the other one. He told me he admired me. I told him I wasn't the Ripper. He said he already knew and didn't care. We talked every once and a while after that, when it was just the two of us. I confided in him about the therapy sessions and being afraid of Hannibal."

He wrung his hands and shook his head. "I couldn't sleep I was so scared. I don't even remember the reason behind the fear, just that it was all encompassing. Matthew didn't like what was happening, he told Chilton I was going to break and that he needed to stop."

"And did he?"

"No," Will said thickly. "He slowed down some, but he kept doing it."

Hannibal cleared his throat and Eckelson looked over to him. "I believe Brown's motivation was due to his obsession with Will and his need to protect him. The man saw me as a detriment to Will's sanity and sought to remove the cause of Will's fear, even though that fear was created by Fredrick Chilton."

"We've gone off on a tangent here." Eckelson rubbed at his face. "Just what is it you're trying to tell me, Mister Graham?"

Will lost his courage. "This is stupid. I'm sorry for wasting your time, I shouldn't have bothered you with this."

The case agent shook his head but remained quiet as Hannibal gave a tiny growl of irritation at Will. The doctor sat forward and forced the empath to make eye contact, holding his face gently, even as his words were a harsh order.

"Will, tell him what you told me. I refuse to allow that man to remain free. I simply won't have it."

"Doctor Lecter," Eckelson frowned, "you don't need to be so-"

"Yes," Hannibal said, cutting the other man off with a look over his shoulder. "I do."

"Doctor-"

"It's fine," Will said quietly. "He's right."

Will shook his face free from Hannibal's grasp and took several deep, shuddery breaths. When he felt more in control, he met Eckelson's gaze. "Chilton's the Ripper."

Eckelson narrowed his eyes and looked down at the coffee table for several drawn-out moments. Will shifted uncomfortably, scowled, and pulled as far away from Hannibal as his chair allowed.

"I told you!" He glared at Hannibal angrily. "I told you this would happen."

Hannibal sighed in frustration. "Will-"

"No, I told you no one would believe me!"

"Whoa!" Eckelson quickly interjected, waving his hands in wide movements to stop the spat that was brewing. "I'm not saying I don't believe you. I'm just thinking it through before asking anything else."

Will huffed, not believing the agent, but subsided grudgingly after he shot a nasty look at the psychiatrist. Hannibal sighed tiredly and pinched the bridge of his nose in irritation.

"I can see good points in you favor," the agent placated. "Chilton was a neurosurgeon, so he'd have the medical skills necessary. By others' accounts, he's a bit arrogant."

Will snorted and Hannibal's lips twitched.

"He obviously doesn't hold his Hippocratic oath in high regard from what you've told me about his experiments." Eckelson frowned. "What else makes you think he's the Chesapeake Ripper?"

"He's not arrogant, he's egotistical and a narcissist." Will corrected. "Why do you think he works in a psychiatric prison? It feeds his sense of superiority and gives him access to defenseless patients."

"I must agree with Will. I have spent a good deal of time with Fredrick, having invited him to one or two of my minor dinner parties and accompanied him to the opera with Alana Bloom.

He was quite presumptuous, flirting with my date the entire evening. Doctor Bloom left the opera early due to his unwanted attention."

"You didn't go with her?"

Hannibal shook his head. "I am on the Opera House's Board. I could not leave mid-way through a performance, it would have been entirely inappropriate. Doctor Bloom understood; as did I for her departure."

"What else?"

Will rubbed a hand over his face. "Tell him about Sutcliffe, Hannibal."

Hannibal pursed his lips at the reminder of the neurologist but nodded. "Doctor Sutcliffe, a colleague I took Will to for an opinion on his illness, lied about Will's encephalitis."

Eckelson opened his notepad and wrote notes as Hannibal spoke. "Did he know Chilton?"

"Donald was friends and colleagues with Fredrick, just as he was with me."

"And you think Chilton killed him."

"Donald was killed in his office after Georgia Madchen followed Will to the hospital. It can be argued that she murdered him, however I believe it was done for another reason."

"And what would that be?"

Will grimaced and pushed on his belly where BG was pressing a fist outwards. "I was getting another MRI. He was murdered during the scan."

"If he lied about the encephalitis already, why kill him?"

Hannibal made a distressed sound. "I have no doubt that he would have told Will the truth after the second scan. It would have been unconscionable for him to keep silent any longer. Donald would have been sentencing Will to death if he did not, and that would not have sat right with him."

"But how does that link Chilton to this?"

"I fear that Donald may have confided in Fredrick about Will's diagnosis after he altered the results. I was not in the room with Doctor Sutcliffe the entire time Will was being scanned, so it is quite possible that Donald made the discovery, decided to not tell Will or I, and changed the scan results before I returned."

"Chilton was a neurosurgeon and chose to become a psychiatrist," Eckelson mused. "He's obviously intrigued by the mind."

"He likes manipulating it," Will cut in harshly. "He experimented on me with a type of therapy that he knew had driven another person to murder. He implanted the personalities of several serial-killers into Gideon and didn't inform us of that fact when we were trying to

capture him. Chilton wound Gideon up and watched him go, knowing it would draw Jack's attention, and by extension, mine."

"You make it sound as if he's obsessed with you."

"He is," Will bit out, startling the agent with the harshness. "Everything he's been doing lately is because of me, to get to me."

"Why though? Why you?"

Will gave a hollow laugh, something that made both men flinch. "He's lonely."

The empath swallowed in disgust and cradled his belly unconsciously. "The Chesapeake Ripper views himself above the human race, as more than human, better. Humans are pigs to him, the only good they do is when they're dead because then they're either art or food. The Ripper is one of a kind but that leaves him alone, no one to share his art with, his life."

Eckelson's face twisted in mild disgust at Will's implications. "Psychopaths aren't capable of love, or at least a true desire for companionship. They may tie themselves to other people, but it's only as long as the person is useful."

Will shook his head. "If you only learn one thing about the Ripper, Agent Eckelson, it's that he's not a psychopath. There's no word for what he is. He's capable of emotion, just like you or I, but he can shut it off. He feels, but only when he wants to."

The room descended into thick silence before Hannibal spoke up. "I wanted you to know about this because I'm afraid of what could happen if Fredrick truly is the Chesapeake Ripper and were to remain free."

He turned his head to observe the pale and drawn Will and thinned his lips in rising anger. "Again, I agree with Will. The Ripper is lonely, seeking a connection, and has focused his attention on Will. It is incredibly dangerous for Will as long as this serial-killer remains at large. There is no telling what he would do in order to locate Will, to draw him out into the open."

"But why Mister Graham in the first place? I'm sorry-" he shot Will an apologetic look, "-but I would think that someone as careful as the Ripper is would be leery of getting involved with someone as unstable as Mister Graham was at the time."

Will dragged a trembling hand over his right cheekbone, pushing at the skin under his eye before he dropped the appendage down onto his stomach. "I have perfect empathy," he explained. "What better person than the person who could understand you completely?

"I was unstable because of the encephalitis, but that was an opportunity for him. Not only could he observe it's effects, but he could also use it to frame me for his own crimes and, at the same time, mold me into what he was looking for."

"A killer?"

Will looked at Eckelson bleakly. "A monster equal to his."

Hannibal picked up the conversation. "When the encephalitis was discovered and cured, Fredrick had to use other means to get the end result he wanted."

"The psychic-driving?"

Hannibal nodded gravely. "He had already used Abel Gideon as a test subject so he knew the technique would work, and with Will imprisoned and under his influence he was free to continue what he started."

"God," Eckelson sighed tiredly and leaned back against the couch cushion. "It does make sense, in a twisted way."

Will pulled a face in whole-hearted agreement and started to make large circles on his distended abdomen, trying to sooth the active baby nestled inside. The action caught Eckelson's attention, and the agent eyed him in thought. He slowly sat forward and set the notepad he had still been holding on the table beside the recorder.

"Mister Graham," he started cautiously. "I'm sorry if I dredge up anything disturbing for you, but I'm afraid I need to know. Is Chilton the father of your child?"

Will's complexion paled to stark-white and he gripped his stomach in disgust and fear. "God, no!"

"Mister Graham, I know this has to be hard but-"

"He's not! He never touched me!" Will shook his head rapidly, his breathing quickening. "No."

Hannibal quickly took control of the situation and moved forward into Will's space, sitting on the arm of Will's chair. He tipped Will's head to get the empath's panicked attention and began to walk the younger man through several exercises that would calm him and get his breathing back under control. It took many tense minutes, but when he was finally calm he was exhausted and had to lean against Hannibal. Will rested his head against the doctor's side and closed his eyes tiredly.

"I'm sorry," Eckelson apologized to Hannibal, "But I need to know if he's lying."

Hannibal ran a hand through Will's curls absent-mindedly before sighing.

"Fredrick is not the father," he said simply.

A long moment of silence and then, "You are."

Will made a distressed sound, not happy that Hannibal was putting his reputation and job in danger, but the doctor shushed him.

"I am."

"That can be considered abuse as well, Doctor," Eckelson pointed out evenly. "You're his psychiatrist."

"Never officially and not in any capacity since his imprisonment. We were both grown, consenting adults and it is no one's business but our own."

"Was it ongoing?"

"No. It happened once and we decided to leave things as they were."

"It had to have happened right before that entire mess happened, right?"

Hannibal tipped his head, both in agreement to the statement and thanks to the agent for leaving the touchy subject alone. "It did, a little less than a week before the episode that drove Will to Minnesota."

"Did Chilton know? I would imagine it would be a hard thing to hide."

"From my understanding, no, Fredrick was not aware of Will's pregnancy. And, frankly, I am exceedingly grateful for that. I shudder to think what would have happened if Fredrick had learned of the child while Will was still incarcerated."

"You think he would have hurt the baby?"

"Possibly, or he would have used the pregnancy for his own means. As Will's legal medical proxy, he would have had the right to make any medical or legal decision in regards to the child on Will's behalf."

"I don't understand, how was Chilton his proxy?"

"The courts deemed Will incompetent when they remanded him to the hospital. There was no one to fill the role so the hospital was made surrogate by default."

"So he's been hiding from Chilton this entire time?"

"Will has been hiding from everyone since his release, myself included. I only found him Monday by chance."

"Why?" Eckelson waved a hand at Hannibal. "I would think you'd be the first one he'd go to."

Hannibal shook his head, his tone reluctant when he next spoke. "Will blames himself from when he was convinced I was the Ripper. He also believes himself responsible for Matthew Brown's attempt on my life. Jack and Doctor Bloom are convinced Will asked Brown to kill me, as revenge for framing him."

"But you don't think so."

"No. However, Jack and Alana still think Will believes I was the Ripper and acted in revenge. Which is why he went into hiding instead of going to them for help. They wouldn't believe him, not when he had already cried wolf."

"And you?" Eckelson asked curiously.

Hannibal sighed and ran his hand over a groggy-Will's scalp. "He was afraid of how I would react. I am a bachelor by choice and prefer to be single. It is logical for one to assume I would not take warmly to the news of impending fatherhood. Especially with a man that, to Will, had wronged me in such a grievous manner.

"There was also his previous mental instability. Many people would be dead-set against Will raising a child, believing him unfit. He was, and still is, terrified that the baby would be taken away from him. He's always wanted a family and it would be disastrous for him to be so close to achieving it, only to have it torn asunder by those that think they mean well."

"He does seem a bit..." Eckelson trailed off.

The doctor scowled. "Will has been under extreme duress these past few days and that is completely my fault. I have been pushing him to tell someone about what has been done to him, something I most likely should not have done given his condition."

Will groaned, prompting Hannibal to situate himself differently on the chair's arm so the empath could lean more comfortably against him. The younger man sighed before he seemed to drop off to sleep, giving Eckelson the chance to discuss something he had been wary of doing in front of him.

"Freddy Lounds is still missing and people are pointing fingers at Graham," he stated plainly.

Hannibal's temper flared, maroon eyes narrowing in veiled anger, and he let his words come out clipped and cold, not bothering to hide the genuine disgust he had for the rude woman.

"Freddy Lounds makes her living off of stalking and tormenting people, Will especially. She attacks decent people's character, rips it to shreds, and spits on it for good measure. Miss Lounds has made it a personal calling to destroy Will's life and nothing anyone has done has even stilled her momentum on that front. Will Graham is not insane and he most certainly did not kill her."

Eckelson threw his hands up in surrender. "Easy, I never said she was dead."

"With a woman that despised, it is not a matter of if you'll find her body but when. It is only natural for me to assume you consider Will a suspect based on their well-publicized animosity."

The agent nodded, agreeing with Hannibal's assessment of the situation. He motioned to Will and shrugged his shoulders. "Kind of hard to point the finger at him though. It's obvious he wouldn't be capable of the physical activity needed to kill someone and dispose of the body. Especially not in a place like this."

Hannibal let out an exhale and relaxed his shoulders, letting his defensiveness go. "You can inquire about Will's activity with the hotel staff. From what I've picked up on, they've taken to watching him like a hawk due to his difficulties."

"Difficulties?" Eckelson asked.

"Yes, apparently he's had a challenging pregnancy, extreme bouts of sickness and lethargy coupled with his age. It's not a good combination. I wouldn't be surprised if his obstetrician has warned him against having more children."

"But he's doing alright?"

"Yes. He's actually carried the baby further than most males, a full nine months. Doctor Burnam has extended the delivery-date twice. While he's tired and sick a good deal more than usual, his body isn't showing signs of preeclampsia or Braxton Hicks."

"That's good. He said the c-section's in two weeks?"

Hannibal nodded. "He's been working himself up about the worst case scenarios. The surgery will be at the general hospital."

Eckelson's face lit with understanding. "And he's afraid Chilton will find out and visit."

"Burnam has used her sway at the hospital to arrange a private room and as much secrecy as possible, but there is no guarantee. It's not just Fredrick he worries about visiting."

"Makes sense," the FBI agent said as he stood. He continued on as he collected the recorder and his pad. "I can't really help with Crawford but I can try with Chilton. If he is the Ripper I want to get him as soon as possible, especially with how obsessed the killer seems to be with Graham."

"What will you do?"

"I'll pull a warrant, quietly, when I leave here. I'm hoping I can hit his house while he's out."

Hannibal agreed with the man. "Please be very careful. If he is the Ripper, he'll either assume you'll believe every word he says and deny everything vehemently, or he will do as much damage as possible before you take him in. If he lets you take him in. This killer doesn't kill because he needs to, he does it because he enjoys it, and that makes him very dangerous. I believe that he values his freedom over anything else, going to great lengths to ensure it. Look what he did to Will. That took months of careful and involved planning to get the desired outcome."

Eckelson nodded gravely. "I'll try to keep you informed. I would suggest sticking with Graham until further notice."

"I've already made the necessary arrangements," he assuaged. "My schedule is mostly cleared for the week of the surgery besides a few appointments and I have a colleague of mine on standby in the case I require more time away from the office. I have no intention of leaving Will to do this on his own. He deserves better."

Hannibal moved to rise and show the agent out, but Eckelson waved a hand and nodded his head towards Will. The younger man was leaning completely against Hannibal's side and frowning, his face pale and drawn even in sleep.

"I can see myself out." He gave Hannibal a gentle smile. "Congratulations by the way. I know it's a big step, but once you see the kid they really will make everything you're giving up worth it."

Hannibal ran a hand through Will's curls and stared at the agent thoughtfully. "I take it you have children of your own?"

"Yep, two girls and a boy. Scared me shitless when their mother told me the first time." Eckelson started for the door. "There's nothing in the world like holding something that's half you. Every part of you just starts screaming that it's yours and you'd suddenly do anything for them. It was nice meeting both of you, Doctor Lecter."

"You as well, Agent Eckelson."

The door closed and Hannibal stared at it thoughtfully until Will pulled away and looked up at him with a pleased expression.

"Well, that went well. Don't you think?"

Monday morning heralded another delicious breakfast with Celeste and a special edition of the Baltimore Sun. The older woman handed the folded paper to Will and passed a plate of blood sausages over to Hannibal with a raised eyebrow. Hannibal gave her an innocent look, making Celeste snort inelegantly, and he poured tea for each of them. The two men took turns reading the outlandish article, each critiquing the author's depiction of Chilton's arrest.

Chilton was detained when he returned home Saturday night after the FBI raided his home and found evidence linking him to two of the Cheaspeake Ripper murders. Most of the evidence was in a basement refrigerator, packed away in airtight tupperware containers with hand-written recipes taped to the lids of each one. Further proof led Eckelson and his team to an abandoned cabin the next day where Miriam Lass was found, alive, in a basement well.

Will wondered where Hannibal learned to forge Chilton's handwriting.

Eckelson called Will Thursday morning to request another meeting. Hannibal was in Baltimore, seeing a few last-minute patients that couldn't be rescheduled, so Will made the impulsive decision to allow the agent's visit. He called Hannibal's office and left a message for him, seeing as how the man accidentally left his personal phone at the hotel.

The agent sat on the couch across from him and looked around the suite. "Where's Doctor Lecter?"

Will waved a hand. "A few of his patients called yesterday, insisting that they couldn't wait until their next appointment. He crammed them all in today so he wouldn't have to worry about them calling next week."

"Ah," Eckelson nodded in sympathy. "I could imagine how busy his job has to be."

"Worse than ours sometimes."

Eckelson nodded again and looked at Will curiously, making Will raise an eyebrow in question.

"Sorry," the agent said. "It's just... You seem..."

"Less neurotic?" the empath supplied helpfully.

The other snorted. "Calmer."

"Wouldn't you be?" Will asked. "The man that ruined my life is behind bars. I don't have to worry about him hunting me down and showing up out of the blue anymore."

Eckelson made an agreeing sound and sat back, crossing his right leg over his left. "That's what I came to talk to you about."

Will shot the other man a look. "He is still in custody, right?"

"Yes, of course," Eckelson said, surprised. "No, no no. I only wanted to give you an update on this entire thing, before you read it in the paper."

"What's happened?" Will asked warily, knowing full-well that something said like that heralded nothing good.

"A few things." The agent shifted in his seat. "First off, Lass identified Chilton as the man who abducted her. She originally went to interview him about the Ripper case and he blind-sided her. He kept her in that cabin from the very beginning."

"Okay..." Will drawled. "How is that bad?"

"She identified him by freaking out and shooting him in the face."

Will's mouth hung open in shock, the empath genuinely not sure how to take that piece of news.

Eckelson nodded. "Yeah, that was pretty much my reaction too."

"Is he alive?" Will asked, forcing his excitement back so he could appear properly concerned.

"Yes. He was rushed to the hospital and staff saved him. He'll be fucking ugly the rest of his life, but I figure he deserves a little reminder of what he did."

Will just nodded, unsure of what to say to that. It prompted Eckelson to continue.

"Next up, Matthew Brown."

"Oh God," Will groaned, closing and rubbing his eyes. "Please, please tell me he hasn't escaped."

"No. Though you were right, he is creepy." Eckelson uncrossed his legs and sat forward. "I had to verify your account from when you were incarcerated."

A tight ball of dread began to form in Will's stomach. "And what did he say?"

"Pretty much what you did. Chilton was using psychic driving on you and Brown told Chilton to stop. Chilton was all around obsessive with you. The other employees mentioned that as well."

Of course they would, the ex-agent thought with amusement, the entire prison would be ecstatic to see Chilton get his ass kicked to the curb, patients and staff. They were probably all waiting for the first domino to fall so they could say anything to get him canned, or arrested. Matthew probably knew exactly what he was doing when he corroborated Will's version.

Relief made the fear fade, and Will knew he would have to thank the little sycophant somehow for backing up his story. Maybe he could get Hannibal to do it? The thought of the those two in the same room again made the pregnant male want to laugh, but he ignored the urge and focused back on the visiting agent.

"That's good, right?"

"Yep. Another nail in Chilton's coffin."

"Is that it? So you have everything you need to charge him? Will they prosecute?"

"We found additional evidence at the cabin that indicates him setting you up. There was remnants of material used in fly-fishing lures, soil found on a previous body. We had pretty much everything we needed."

"Had?" Will asked, allowing his dread to show.

Eckelson grew silent and shifted uneasily before clearing his throat. "We had another witness come forward. They saw the arrest and contacted the police."

The empath bit his tongue before speaking. "Are they not reliable?"

"No," the agent said slowly, looking at Will carefully, "that's not it."

"Then what's the matter?"

Eckelson licked his lips nervously. "Mister Graham, I'm not sure how to say this."

"Like a bandaide," Will quipped.

The other male didn't laugh but took his advice. He inhaled deeply before meeting Will's eyes. "Abigail Hobbs is alive. We positively identified her after she came forward late Tuesday night."

"What... No, that can't... what-" The words died on Will's tongue as his chest constricted and his stomach rippled painfully.

"Mister Graham?" The agent frowned as Will grimaced. "I know it's a shock, but this is good. She's alive."

"No-" Will panted, his face twisting. "That's not... she can't be. Her ear... it was..."

Eckelson shook his head. "It was cut off, but that's all that was done. She got away and has been hiding ever since."

It was getting harder to breathe and Will started to panic. His lungs were in a vice grip and cramps were starting to pull at his insides. A particularly harsh contraction had him crying out, his eyes watering from the pain, and the agent's eyes widened before he quickly dialed 911 on his phone and moved to kneel beside Will's chair.

"This is FBI Agent Bart Eckelson. I'm at Edgemoore Estate, Columbia, Maryland. I have a pregnant male, mid to late thirties, appears to be in distress. Breathing is labored and he's clutching his middle." Eckelson looked at Will's abdomen. "I think he's nine months."

"Eight and three-quarters," Will corrected, hissing as another wave of pain assaulted him. He forced his mind to ignore the news about Abigail for now, panic about the baby making it easy to do.

The agent passed the information on before listening to the operator for several long moments. He nodded before speaking to Will in a calm tone, his free hand moving to rest on one of the empath's. "It's going to be fine, Will. They're sending paramedics now and we'll get you to a hospital."

"General..." Will gasped. "It has to be general."

"Your doctor, right?"

Will nodded and threw his head against the chair's back, banging it harshly and sucking in air through his clenched teeth.

Eckelson informed the dispatcher and squeezed Will's hand as he hung up. "What's her number? I'll call her so she can meet us."

The empath groaned and grabbed the cellphone that rested on the table beside him, thrusting it blindly at the agent. Eckelson took it and thumbed through the contacts, dialing the only person with 'Dr.' before their name. He relayed the situation and hung up.

"The nurse is going to let her know and she'll be on her way."

"Hannibal-" Will gasped weakly. "Hannibal needs to know."

"I'll call him."

"Can't," the pregnant male groaned. "The fucker left his phone here."

"I'll send someone then," the FBI agent said ruefully at the empath's irritation.

Will bit his lip and whimpered when a severe cramp took over, his entire lower half seizing in pain. He sobbed once, a short sound, and when the pressure let up he looked down at the other man. "Beverly."

"What?"

"Send Beverly."

"Beverly who?" Eckelson asked.

"Katz. She works with Jack. Please" Will grunted and knocked his head against the chair again. "She's the only one I trust."

Eckelson sighed but nodded and dialed FBI dispatch. "This is Agent Eckelson, get me Agent Beverly Katz, Quantico, Virginia. Medical Emergency."

Both men waited several long beats, Will's gasps filling the void where conversation should have been, until a female voice sounded over the line.

"Katz, this is Eckelson. Listen, I need you to go to Hannibal Lecter's office. He's with patients so he's not picking up. Tell him that Will Graham is being taken to General Hospital and he needs to meet us there."

Even through the haze from the cramps, Will picked out the worried tone in Bev's voice. He weakly motioned for the phone and pressed it against his ear when it was given to him.

"... tell me right now!" The tail-end of Beverly's order sounded through the phone.

"Bev?" Will asked.

"Will! Oh my god, what's happening? Where the hell have you been?!"

"You know that betting pool about me and Hannibal?" he groaned.

"Will, what's going on? What's wrong?"

Will closed his eyes and sucked in air through his mouth, attempting to block the pain. "I'm in labor and I really need Hannibal."

There was a long silence before the woman shrieked. "Oh my god! Oh my god!"

"Beverly," he bit out.

"Sorry," she apologized, calming down quickly. "Okay. Okay, I'll go get him for you Will. General Hospital, yeah? Don't worry, I'll drag him out of his office kicking and screaming if I

have to."

"All you're going to have to do is make sure he doesn't drive," he chuckled weakly before crying out.

"Will? Will!"

Eckelson took the phone back and let her know an ambulance was coming and that she needed to get moving. He hung up and pocketed both his cell and Will's before standing to open the front door. The paramedics were making their way up to the suite so the agent crossed back over to the empath and squeezed his shoulder.

"Do you need me to get anything? A go-bag?"

"Closet," Will gritted out. "And my pad and charger on the table. Hannibal's phone off the counter."

The older man nodded before quickly gathering the listed items, slipping Hannibal's phone into the bag just as the paramedics and hotel staff streamed into the room. The EMTs were efficient and soon had Will loaded into the ambulance and hooked up to an IV as they sped off.

It was a painful thirty minute ride, the paramedic in the back asking question after question to a groaning and whimpering Will, the empath smacking at the EMT's hands when he pressed on Will's belly. It was a relief to everyone when the ambulance came to a stop outside the hospital and the vehicle doors were jerked open by emergency room staff.

Things went quickly from there. Will was unloaded from the ambulance and rushed into the building, nurses checking his vitals as they pushed him straight through the department to the elevator. The pregnant male looked around confusedly and a nurse at his side patted his hand, her strained smile telling Will more about his condition than he wanted to know.

"We're taking you strait to the O.R.. Michelle is already scrubbing up."

"Michelle?" Will groaned as a particularly bad cramp wracked his middle.

"Doctor Burnam, honey," she said with a hint of worry.

"Oh," he sighed. "Never did manage to catch her first name."

Another nurse snorted and shook her head, pressing the up button for the elevator. Will grabbed the first nurse's arm weakly and she looked down at him.

"There's going to be," Will grimaced at another wave of pain, "there's going to be a man. Hannibal Lecter."

She nodded. "We'll make sure he gets to where you are, honey."

Will sighed in relief, letting his arm fall onto the gurney, and looked up at the ceiling as they loaded him onto the elevator. His insides seemed on fire, his chest squeezed in a vice grip and

his heart bounced wildly like a rubber ball as BG rolled manically from her father's stress. The metal of the elevator glinted brightly, like light playing off a knife's blade, and Will was abruptly reminded of just what had cause this situation.

Abigail was alive.

Hannibal hadn't killed her.

Abigail was alive and Hannibal had lied to him about it.

Alarms started to blare as Will's eyes rolled back and his body went into arrest.

Waking wasn't a gradual process. Contrary to popular belief, he didn't swim in and out of consciousness for hours before finally rejoining the world of the living, loved ones on either side of him.

No, Will woke quickly. The same way he did when he dreamt of falling, a quick sudden jolt that propelled him from unconsciousness to awareness. He woke in a hospital room, a tube up his nose, and a headache that rivaled any of his whiskey-bender hangovers. His whole body hurt, his abdomen in particular, and he rested his hand on the bandages that covered his middle.

His eyes widened in panic as his mind, dulled from medication, caught up with what he wasn't feeling, and he heard the nearby beeping of his monitor begin to go crazy. Will tried to sit up but sharp pain lanced through his abdomen and he whimpered as he dropped back down. Hands tore at the bandages taped down onto his now flattened midsection and he clenched his eyes, tears falling as his chest constricted.

"Will? Will, you need to listen to me," a voice sounded from his left. Hands gripped his and pulled them away from his middle and another set bracketed his face. "Will, look at me."

Blue eyes opened and Will saw Burnam standing over him. He gasped and let out a strangled sob, his hands pulling at the appendages holding them.

"It's fine, Will. She's absolutely fine. Will, listen to me. She's fine."

She shook his face and he closed his eyes and focused on breathing, trying to hear her and what she was saying.

"Your baby is completely fine but you need to calm down. Breathe for me Will. That's it, deep breaths."

The obstetrician talked Will down from his panic and measured his pulse and oxygen intake critically until it was in the normal range. She smiled at the empath and squeezed his hand before sitting in the seat beside the bed. Burnam rested her arms on the bedrail and smiled tiredly.

"You've been keeping people on their toes, Will."

"How-" Will's voice cut off, cracking from the dryness.

Burnam fed him ice-chips a nurse conveniently arrived with and he tried again.

"How long?"

"Day and a half," she said. "It's Friday night."

"What happened?" Will asked as he looked around the room.

"You had an anxiety attack at home that escalated. The baby went into distress." She frowned. "You went into cardiac-arrest in the elevator. We were able to resuscitate and we operated."

"The baby?" Will looked at his doctor in worry.

Burnam smiled. "Perfectly healthy. Ten fingers, ten toes, two eyes, one nose."

Will chuckled tiredly at the rhyme and looked around again. "Where is she?"

"Down the hall in the nursery. She's the envy of all the nurses. We've instigated a bag policy to make sure no one sneaks off with her." She laughed at the look on Will's face. "I'm only joking, Will. Besides, they'd have to get past Hannibal first."

The reminder of Hannibal made Will scowl harshly as anger roared upwards. He closed his eyes and took deep breaths, his hands clenching into fists. The monitor's beeping began to increase and he heard Burnam shift in her seat.

"Will?" she asked uncertainly.

Will shook his head and kept his eyes closed until the rage he felt was banked down into something controllable before he looked at the woman beside him. "Sorry."

"What just happened?"

He shook his head and Burnam let the matter drop.

"When can I see her?" Will asked as he tried to sit up.

Burnam smiled again as she pushed him back down onto the bed. She raised the bed's back until Will was half-way sitting. "Tomorrow morning, after you rest some."

The empath scowled. "I've been asleep for the past two days. I want my baby."

"No," Doctor Burnam corrected, "you've been unconscious after a major surgery. I know you want to hold her, but you need to sleep some before you do. You're shaking and don't even realize it."

She was right, Will realized. His entire body was racked with fine trembles, his hands shaking the worst. It made sense to wait until he was stronger. He didn't have to like it, but he'd wait until morning to see BG.

"Fine," he sighed reluctantly. "But I want her first thing tomorrow."

"Yes, sir," Burnam saluted as she stood and left.

"I mean it!" Will called after her. "Don't make me get out of this bed!"

Will had been holding a sleeping BG for over an hour before Hannibal finally showed up, stopped in the doorway and watching. The empath looked up and stared back, unwilling to break the tension first. Hannibal broke eye-contact to close the door and moved to the foot of the bed, his gaze returning to the tableau in front of him.

"She looks like you."

Will remained silent, his blue eyes hooded with forced calm.

Hannibal sighed and looked at BG before speaking, his tone weary. "I wanted it to be a surprise."

Rage licked at the back of Will's throat, but he swallowed it down and continued to stare at the other mutely. Hannibal didn't seem to know what to do with that reaction and shifted slightly in agitation.

"Will..."

"You cut off her ear," Will cut in quietly, effectively silencing anything Hannibal had to say, "and fed it to me."

Hannibal seem to recognize the dangerous footing he was on so he remained quiet, watching him warily.

"Whatever explanation you have for that, I don't care and I don't want to hear it." Will stared down at BG sleeping in his arms before taking a deep breath. "I grieved her, Hannibal, and you let me. That is worse than anything else you've ever done to me."

"I was planning our future," Hannibal admitted softly after it was clear Will was done speaking. The doctor sighed again when the younger male refused to look at him. "You and I were supposed to leave, go to Europe. She'd be there waiting for us."

The empath asked evenly, "Waiting for us where?"

"Home."

That single word tore at Will and he turned his head in agitation.

"Damn it, Hannibal," he swore tiredly, feeling his anger start to fade. "Why did you have to do this?"

"I wanted us to have a fresh start," Hannibal said, as if sensing the weakening of Will's defenses. He moved to the side of the bed and stood looking down at Will and the baby. "You're the first person in a very long time that I care for. I fought through your forts and realized that you were exceptional, unique, and I quickly coveted you."

Will bit his lip.

"I was lonely, and you made me see that," Hannibal continued softly. "You challenged me. You were the first person that I thought could be my equal, my friend."

"And Abigail?" Will asked, resigned to the answer.

"A means to an end," Hannibal admitted.

It hurt, Hannibal saying that, and Will's eyes began to fill with bitter tears. One of Hannibal's large hands was placed under Will's chin and it tilted the younger man's face up so he had to meet the psychiatrist's gaze.

"That does not mean I don't care for her, Will, because I do. Very much. It pained me to harm her."

"Then why did you do it?"

"You were close to figuring things out. You were going to realize who I was and it was too soon. You weren't ready. I was going to lose you."

"You framed me for murder, Hannibal. I went to prison," The empath hissed out and jerked his head away from the other's grip. "You lost me anyway."

Hannibal cupped Will's cheek again and gently forced Will's head back. "And yet here we are."

Will pulled away once more and fiddled with the blanket BG was swaddled in. "I hate you."

"I know," Hannibal sighed. "But I would like to think that's not all that remains. I care for you, Will, all of my family."

"And who, exactly, does that include?" Will bit out waspishly and glared at the other. "Are you going to lop off Abigail's other ear when we get into a fight? What next, start on her fingers?"

The doctor's mouth tightened but he remained silent, anger and frustration lurking behind his red eyes. Will saw the monster swimming upwards but knew Hannibal wouldn't hurt him.

Will was lashing out, and Will knew Hannibal was aware of that. The psychiatrist had hurt Will deeply, had broken a large chunk of the remaining trust that existed between them, and lashing out at the younger male would only destroy the little that was left. Hannibal shook his head and sat down. He turned his gaze to BG, miraculously still asleep in her father's arms, and leaned back in the chair.

"I know I've done something you consider unforgivable," Hannibal said at length. "But despite the contrary, you can trust me. I will not harm you or our children again. Not even if you betray me."

He met Will's gaze unwaveringly. "Abigail very much included."

"And what about Celeste?"

The other sighed and nodded. "I will admit you had a valid point about Celeste. She has already run interference with the licensing board."

"What?" Will asked, his mind dropping the remaining anger for the moment. "So soon? What happened?"

"Alana happened," Hannibal said with a slight scowl. "She apparently contacted a friend who knows a board member."

Will laughed. "Nothing like a woman scorned Hannibal."

The older man rolled his eyes and shifted his focus onto BG as she stirred and yawned. The baby's mouth stretched wide, soft pink tissue exposed with a gusty sigh, and Will chuckled as she resettled and opened her eyes to stare at the man holding her. Her younger father ran his fingers over the soft downy hair covering her head and smiled softly.

"She has your eyes," Will murmured.

Hannibal smiled at Will and the baby from where he sat, his elbows resting on the armrests and hands linked over his stomach. Will was self-aware enough to realize how tempting a sight they were to Hannibal, and was completely willing to use that to his advantage.

"You didn't take liberties while I was out and name her, did you?"

The other male shook his head. "No. I thought it best if you name her. As we've discovered, you have more hope for coming up with an original name than I."

Will snorted quietly. "Her bracelet says 'BG Graham'."

"A nickname, I assure you. The nursing staff are smitten."

"I heard," the younger man mused. He contemplated the infant in his arms for many minutes, both men not speaking, and then hit the call button for the nurse station.

A middle-aged woman showed up five minutes later, her smile brightening as she saw BG. "Oh, that one's yours. She's so cute."

Hannibal smirked and Will shot him a look before turning back to the nurse.

"We'd like to name her, if now's a good time."

The nurse perked up and nodded, her smile softening. "Just let me get the proper forms and a witness. We need to submit the forms for her social security number at the same time. I'll be back in a half-hour or so."

It was closer to an hour before the nurse and hospital administrator that was acting as witness returned, laptop in hand. They set it up on Will's tray and the empath handed BG to Hannibal while he helped the staff complete the necessary paperwork. He hesitated after passing her over to her other parent, captivated by the sight of BG and Hannibal. The infant yawned and appeared genuinely content to lie in her serial-killer father's arms, and Hannibal was looking down at the baby-girl with complete adoration.

It warmed Will's heart.

"Last name?" the nurse asked, her fingers hovering over the laptop keys.

"Graham," Will supplied immediately, tearing his gaze from his family.

She typed that in with a nod and tabbed over. "First name?"

The empath smiled at the woman. "Braelyn."

"That's a nice one. You don't have many Braelyns anymore. And does she have a middle?"

Will hesitated before licking his lips. "Gabija."

Hannibal stilled and looked at him, and Will could feel red eyes focused on the side of his head.

The nurse frowned. "Gabya. Haven't heard that one before."

"Gabija," Hannibal corrected softly, still staring at Will as he spelled it for the birth certificate. "Pronounced Gah-BEE-yah. She is a Lithuanian fire spirit and the protector of home and family."

"Braelyn Gabjia Graham. A very pretty name for a very pretty baby," the hospital administrator complemented.

"Yes," Hannibal murmured. "It is."

The rest of the birth certificate was filled in quickly and they moved onto the other forms necessary to register Braelyn with the U.S. government. It was a simple process, only made difficult when Hannibal requested additional information from the hospital so he could file it with the Lithuanian government.

The psychiatrist apparently had dual-citizenship, surprising Will who had thought the older male had completely given up his foreign status, and the doctor thought there was a good

chance Lithuania would grant the baby dual-citizenship as well.

"I am a proven Lithuanian citizen. Braelyn is my daughter by blood so that status should transmit to her regardless of her birth place. I merely need to go through the steps to have the embassy recognize her. I would like her to have a link to my motherland."

The hospital administrator okayed the duplication of forms, and they spent another half hour producing identical documents to the ones they had just completed, only in Lithuanian. Hannibal acted as translator, going so far as to simply take the laptop over when the nurse misspelled something one time too many, much to everyone's entertainment.

When everything was done, both parents were left alone again and they lapsed into silence, Braelyn mewling from her spot back in Will's arms. Hannibal stepped up beside the bed and ran the knuckles of his left hand over the baby's cheek, causing her to swing her blurry gaze in his direction. She gurgled and gave her older father a spit-filled, gummy pout, and Hannibal's composure seemed to melt a little.

"I was surprised you gave her a Lithuanian name after what you found out."

"I was going to name her that even before I found out about Abigail. Besides, I had a feeling your heritage was important to you."

"It is, though I don't mention it." Hannibal met Will's gaze. "Thank you, Will. This means a great deal to me."

Will shrugged, uncomfortable with the other's appreciation. "I was looking at names online and the site had options for Lithuanian. I was curious."

"Still, it is a beautiful name, and it flows well."

"You don't even want to know how long it took to find the right combination."

"I did notice her initials will be B.G.," Hannibal mused.

The empath shrugged again. "It stuck. At lease this way I have a reason for calling her BG."

Hannibal hummed his agreement before taking the baby from Will's arms. "Now, little Gabija, what shall we three do with our morning?"

There was a mental list between Will and Hannibal about who would visit and when. Bev and Celeste were tied for first as they were both foaming at the mouth within hours of Will being admitted, but the two men were unsure of when everyone else would show.

Beverly and Celeste arrived Saturday afternoon within a half-hour of each other to gush over BG with equal fervor, the two women forming an instant bond that seemed to unsettle

Hannibal. They brought baby clothes and stayed the rest of the day, only leaving when the nurses kicked them out.

Zeller and Price showed a little after breakfast Sunday morning, a massive bear with the words 'Daddy's Special Day' on its tee-shirt supported between them. Will glared at the stuffed toy and silently swore to use it as target practice the first chance he could. The two men hung around for an hour before they got twitchy and left of their own accord.

Well-wishers from the Bureau trickled in and out the rest of Sunday, cards and gifts Will would open later making their way into a pile under the window. They would look knowingly at Hannibal, the psychiatrist sitting in the chair beside Will as if holding court, but kept their opinions to themselves. Many subtly mentioned how different Will seemed, more stable and happy, less stressed. Will told them leaving the Bureau was the second best decision he ever made. They would glance knowingly at Hannibal again, and Will would let them jump to their own conclusions.

So, his weekend in the hospital passed with the bustle of guests coming to gawk at his and Hannibal's daughter - everyone knowing who the other father was within hours of Bev finding out - but his Monday morning inched by.

Hannibal decided, at Will's urging, to go back to work until Will was released later that week, and, as all the people Will was familiar with had either already visited or worked a standard schedule, he was left to his own devices.

The only other people that were expected but hadn't shown yet were Jack and Alana. Secretly, Will thought Jack would be the first to show his face and was pleased to be proven correct once again. Will was bottle-feeding BG when the FBI agent knocked on the door Tuesday afternoon, a gift-bag in hand.

"Jack," Will greeted. "Come on in."

The older man hesitated before entering. He closed the door behind him and slowly made his way over to the bed, watching the baby in Will's arms before he placed the bag on the tray and stood awkwardly beside the bedrail.

Will sighed and motioned his head at the chair a step behind the other man. "Sit down, Jack."

Jack sat and met Will's gaze. "I need to understand Will. Is he threatening you? Did you make him a deal?"

The empath looked at him in confusion before he understood what the other male meant and shook his head. "Hannibal is not the Ripper, Jack."

The agent's mouth twisted and he leaned forward, glancing at the closed door as he did so. Will knew what the other was going to say but let him speak, knowing Jack would feel compelled to offer rescue.

"We can protect you, Will. Whatever he's holding over you, whatever he said he'd do if you came forward, I can stop him."

Will bit his tongue before the instinctive words could escape and sighed instead. "I was wrong."

"You swore up and down that he was," Jack argued. "But of course you're going to say otherwise when you've just had the man's baby. You feel like you have to protect him, Will, but you don't."

"I was sick, Jack. I was seeing connections that weren't there."

"Bullshit," Jack said harshly, startling Braelyn. "You were never wrong."

Will glared at the man and rocked BG, careful not to dislodge the bottle in her mouth. "My hallucinations made me mentally unstable and violent. I took Abigail to Minnesota on a whim, had a seizure, and ended up vomiting her ear. I kidnapped Hannibal and you had to shoot me so I wouldn't kill him. I thought he was a fucking wendigo for a while. What part of any of that screams 'reliable' to you?"

The agent shook his head. "You closed every case."

"After you manipulated, brow-beat, and blatantly threatened me," Will shot back. "And afterwords, I had another killer rolling around inside my head vying for attention."

"You never told me that," the other said frowning.

"I told you it wasn't good for me to Look the way you wanted me to," the empath growled. "Alana told you that. Hell, even Hannibal told you that."

The mention of Hannibal had Jack scowling. "He abused his authority, Will. Can't you see that? He used you."

"He was never my official therapist so there wasn't any authority to abuse, you made sure of that when you asked him to keep me off the books. Whatever happened between us was between two consenting adults." Will smirked at the agent before continuing on. "And I was pretty happy to let him use me."

Disgust at the vulgarity flickered across Jack's face before the man shut it down and sighed disappointedly. "What about all those people Will?"

"What people?"

"The Ripper's victims? Don't they deserve justice?"

Will looked at Jack incredulously. "Jack, the Ripper is in custody. He's going to stand trial and be put away for the rest of his life."

Jack growled and ran a hand down his face. "Chilton isn't the Ripper and you know it."

"What I know is that Hannibal may have sociopathic tendencies, but so do you and I. He didn't do it, Jack. I'm sorry, but I can't tell you what you want to hear."

"Will-"

"No," Will cut him off. "I was sick and confused and Chilton used that to his advantage. If anyone abused their authority, it would be him.

"Chilton used me," he continued with a scowl. "He subjected me to the same thing he did Gideon, tried to do the same thing to me he did to that poor bastard. He harassed me outside of prison and blatantly tortured me inside it. He convinced Suttcliffe to lie about my encephalitis."

"You don't know that."

"Yes, I do. Chilton always wanted to study my empathy disorder. He made it clear on several occasions that he'd use any opportunity provided to him, maybe engineer one."

The older man frowned. "You never told me he threatened you."

"I thought no one would take me seriously. Honestly, what would you say when I told you a psychologist wanted to study me."

Any reply Jack would have made was cut off when BG began to cry, her tiny fists batting at the bottle still held to her mouth. She wailed for all she was worth, her face scrunched up and turning an unattractive shade of red. Will set the bottle down and carefully readjusted her so she wouldn't get sick when he began to rock her.

"What's wrong?" Jack asked.

Will shot him a look. "She doesn't like the fighting Jack."

"We haven't even raised our voices. She could just be a fussy baby."

"She's been easy going all this time and suddenly becomes fussy the first time I get stressed and angry?"

Jack looked at the baby. "You think she got your empathy?"

"I don't know," Will admitted as he jostled BG up and down gently. "It's possible. But most babies are attuned to their parents Jack. She could just be picking up on my change in mood."

"Sorry," Jack apologized.

Will shook his head. "I can't give you what you want, Jack. I know I said it was Hannibal, but that was almost a year ago when the encephalitis was at its worst."

"Look me in the eye and tell me Hannibal didn't do it."

The empath gathered every ounce of sincerity he could and met Jack's gaze head on. "Hannibal Lecter is not the Chesapeake Ripper," he lied.

"And he isn't coercing you in any way?"

"No."

Jack sighed and his shoulders drooped. "It doesn't feel right. It's all too simple."

"Sometimes things just wrap up that way. It doesn't feel right because you weren't the one to make the arrest, you didn't get closure."

The other man sighed again and hung his head. "I know you're right, but it just..."

He trailed off and Will felt a flash of guilt for lying to Jack like this. BG's tiny fist whacked Will in the cheek, pulling him from his building mood, and he turned his head to plant a kiss on the infant's scalp, the scent of newborn filling his nose. It made Will think of BG and Abigail, his two girls, and he thought of Hannibal, the killer that meant almost everything to him.

Hannibal was his best friend, a man that understood and embraced Will's darkness without hesitation, encouraged it even. The psychiatrist was possibly the most prolific serial-killer in history, but he was Will's defender. He would protect Will's family with every fiber of his blood-soaked being because it was his family as well.

The choice was easy in the end.

"It's hard to let go," Will told the other softly, meeting Jack's eyes when he looked up, "but it's a lesson you have to learn. It will eat you away inside if you don't. You'll spend every moment of the rest of your life wondering what-ifs and chasing shadows that aren't there. Trust me Jack, this isn't worth your sanity."

Tired brown eyes closed and the other man nodded his head reluctantly. Will gave him a painful smile even though he couldn't see it and patted a still crying BG's back, jumping when the baby gave a loud belch. He felt something wet on his shoulder and scowled as Jack began to laugh.

"Picks up on moods, my ass. She's got gas."

"Shut up Jack. God that's gross." He made a face and pulled the infant away from him. "Hold her."

"Oh no. I don't have a change of clothing with me."

"Jack, don't be such an ass."

Jack rolled his eyes and gently took BG from Will, cradling the baby in the curve of a massive arm. He smiled down at her, his face losing twenty years, and Will smiled to himself in accomplishment.

Will carefully slid out of the other side of the bed and slowly undid the ties holding the hospital robe closed. He let it drop to the floor and shakily reached for a new one that was jammed into the small nightstand. After he had changed, the empath gingerly climbed back into bed and sighed as the pressure was taken off his abdomen muscles.

"You still sore?" Jack asked him, watching how Will moved.

The younger man nodded with an exhausted sigh. "They had to open me up in a hurry, so they couldn't be as careful as they normally are. I shouldn't have even gotten up like that. Don't tell anyone or they'll lecture me."

Jack huffed a laugh and looked back down at the baby. "She's adorable, Will."

"Thanks. Hannibal had to beat the nursing staff off with a stick while I was unconscious. BG is going to be trouble, I just know it."

"BG?"

"Braelyn Gabija. BG for short." Will smiled at the quieting baby. "It originally stood for baby-girl, but that was until I discovered baby-naming sites."

"Nice name. Hannibal help pick it out?"

Will shook his head. "He left it to me."

"I notice she has your name."

"Jack," the younger man exhaled, "please just say it."

Jack slipped his finger into Braelyn's fist and waved it around to entertain her. He glanced up at the man in the bed before looking back down. "If Hannibal wasn't the Ripper, why didn't you go to him for help? Why hide?"

"Because I was afraid that no one would believe me. Chilton was a respected psychiatrist and I was an unbalanced patient of his."

"Will," Jack chided him gently.

The empath sighed and shook his head, looking down at his hands in his lap. "I tried to kill him, Jack. I held a gun to his head and the only reason I didn't pull the trigger was because you did."

"You were sick, Will. Hannibal knew that. He doesn't blame you for any of that."

"So? Doesn't mean I can't blame myself."

"Bart Eckelson said you were afraid of how Doctor Lecter would react about the baby."

Will scowled. "Well Bart's just a big gossip, isn't he."

Jack raised an eyebrow and tilted his head to the side once in agreement. "Was he right?"

"Maybe," Will allowed before he caught the other's disapproving frown and gave in. "Alright, yes. I was afraid of Hannibal's reaction. The man is a certified bachelor. What would someone's reaction normally be if they lived without personal attachment by choice? 'You're

pregnant with my kid? Well, golly gee, what wonderful fucking news. Let me just upend my life for some crying little brat.'"

"Stop it," Jack barked, upsetting BG momentarily until he waved her fist in the air again. "You're not being fair, Will. Lecter is a better man than that, and you know it. At the very least he'd offer financial support."

Will exhaled roughly and looked away in shame. "I know."

"Then why?"

"I was scared okay!" Will shouted angrily. "I kept telling people I was innocent and no one was listening to me. I realized I was pregnant and spent the entire time in prison terrified that Chilton would find out about the baby and do something to it just to see how I'd be affected. He pumped me full of experimental drugs and I had no way of knowing if they were hurting her. What if she-"

He cut himself off and Jack leaned forward to grip his arm, BG balanced carefully in his other.

"Say it, Will."

Will looked at Jack tearfully. "What if she came out wrong Jack? Doctor Burnam said it was a miracle she developed normally. What if whatever Chilton had given me had affected her somehow? I was afraid of telling Hannibal because I knew he'd insist on tests. I didn't tell Hannibal because I didn't want to know."

Jack squeezed Will's arm again before handing Braelyn back. "She looks just fine to me."

Will nodded, tears dripping down onto the baby's face, making her squirm unhappily. He wiped the saltwater away and took in a shuddering breath. "He's already taken so much from me, Jack. I couldn't handle him destroying this too."

"Chilton isn't going to be able to hurt you anymore Will. Like you said, there's more than enough proof to convict him."

Will nodded once, still looking down at BG, and Jack hummed before grabbing the bag he had brought.

"Aren't you curious about what I brought for the baby?"

"You mean what Bella picked out."

Jack glared at him. "Do you want to see it or not?"

Jack stayed for a couple hours, getting Will up to speed on the FBI gossip and the agent's personal life before leaving to go home. While the older man was still suspicious of Will's sudden recanting, the empath knew that Jack would eventually let things go. There wasn't much that could be done otherwise. Hannibal had ensured the evidence against Chilton was there, and Will had ensured it would stick.

If only Alana were as simple to placate.

She finally appeared the morning of his discharge, miraculously arriving during one of the few times Will was alone. Burnam was going to make a final visit closer to noon before he could be officially released and so, with time to kill, Hannibal was making the rounds with BG, letting the hospital staff fawn over her and take a couple pictures. Will found the entire thing hilarious but kindly refrained from mocking the aloof psychiatrist about it.

"Will."

Will looked up from the book he was reading and found Alana standing a couple feet in the room, her body language screaming anger and disapproval. Her arms were crossed and her jaw was clenched from obvious irritation. Will raked his gaze over her and set the book aside with a sigh.

"Alana," he greeted tiredly.

Alana ignored the acknowledgement and turned to close the door, letting the heavy wood snap shut with more force than she normally would. She whirled back around and moved to stand at the end of the bed, her expression pale and pinched. Things lapsed into a stiff silence, Alana waiting for him to explain and Will unwilling to apologize for something that he was neither responsible for nor sorry about. Finally, Alana realized she'd have to begin.

"I don't even know where to start," she said.

"From the beginning?" Will quipped, already exhausted with the confrontation.

"Do you understand what you've done? Hannibal can lose his license over this!"

Will frowned. "First of all, you're the one that reported him to the licensing board. Secondly, as it's been pointed out by the board, Hannibal was never my psychiatrist. He was a friend that I had regularly scheduled chats with."

Alana scowled, her pretty face twisting in a way that made her somehow even more attractive. "Do not get into semantics with me. You were his patient in everything but official title. You should have known better, Will."

"Hold on," the empath said, having a sinking suspicion of exactly where this conversation was going. "Are you saying this is my fault?"

"Hannibal was the epitome of professionalism, Will. He would never, never sleep with a patient. And yet here's the proof otherwise. How do you explain that?"

Irritation licked at Will's composure, the man easily understanding what, exactly, her opinion on BG was, but the empath pushed it back and loosely fisted his hands. "I don't need to explain anything to you."

"I beg to differ. I think I deserve to know why sleeping with Hannibal seemed like a good idea."

"I don't have to justify my actions to you, Alana."

"You had sex with him!"

Will rocked back slightly at the unexpected shout from the normally contained woman in front of him. He knew Alana had a temper from when he'd seen her go after Jack on his behalf, but he'd never had it directed at him and it was slightly unsettling. Still, the fact that she was blaming him was galling, and he found himself biting back instinctively harsh words. While he was angry at her, he was usually not the type of man to allow his anger to control him.

That didn't mean well-placed barbs were precluded from his arsenal, however. The empath tilted his head and stared at her for several seconds, his eyes narrowing thoughtfully. "Are you jealous?"

Alana scoffed, a surprisingly rude gesture. "Don't change the subject."

A predatory feeling filled Will at her deflection but he buried the sharp grin he felt building. The hot anger he felt at Alana's nerve was cooling into something detached and it left him with the urge to wound her somehow, to hurt her the way she had hurt him when he had still felt something for her. He scowled at her and crossed his arms, letting his empathy guide his speech.

"I'm not changing the subject. Jealousy is the only thing that could possibly make you think you deserve an explanation for something that is none of you business."

"None of my-" Alana puffed up.

Will continued over her. "I was not under your professional care, and the two of you were not in a personal relationship when Hannibal and I had sex. Therefore, our actions are not your concern."

"It doesn't change the fact that-"

"It's none of your business."

The tone of finality seemed to register for Alana because Will could see her mentally shift gears, different arguments being weighed and discarded until she found one she thought would work on him.

"Why did you sleep with him if you thought he was the Ripper?"

Will knew Alana was baiting the conversation in an attempt to find a viable line of manipulation. She'd throw out enough rope to wrap him up and haul it in when Will tripped. Alana may not realize it but she was looking for blood and Will refused to give her his.

"That was after we slept together."

"And now?"

Will laughed. "Alana, I realized he wasn't the Ripper after the encephalitis was cured and I was imprisoned. I would have told you but you never came to visit."

"Hospitalized," Alana corrected absent-mindedly, "and you really expect me to believe that you woke up one day and simply decided to change your mind? You were adamant that Hannibal was the Chesapeake Ripper."

"I also thought Garett Jacob Hobbs was haunting me. I was seeing and hearing things, Alana."

"Still, that's a sudden change, considering."

"Just say it," Will sighed.

"You sent Matthew Brown to kill Hannibal."

Will locked stares with Alana and willed as much honesty and truth as he could into his demeanor. "Matthew went after Hannibal on his own. I had nothing to do with that."

"We both know that's not true."

"You don't know anything," Will growled, feeling anger stir in the pit of his stomach. "I'll tell you the exact same thing I told Hannibal and Agent Eckelson. Chilton made me so terrified of Hannibal I couldn't function, and Matthew wanted to make it stop. I didn't sic him on anyone."

"You expect me to believe that?"

"I expect you to do whatever it is that you want to do," Will said with a shake of his head. "It's been established that what I think doesn't really matter to you."

Alana scowled, easily understanding Will's veiled meaning. "I'm not here to talk about my relationship with Hannibal."

"Yes, you are," the empath pointed out. "Otherwise you wouldn't be as argumentative as you are right now. You've always thought full-out confrontation wasn't a suitable method of communication because it indicated being emotionally compromised. Relationships are notoriously messy when it comes to emotions."

"Ignoring your previous declaration, you have to see that what happened was an abuse of power," Alana said, refusing to acknowledge Will's jab at her failed relationship by completely changing the topic.

"You know, Jack said the same thing."

"Will-"

"Hannibal wasn't my official psychiatrist, Alana. That's what it comes down to at the end of the day. The board decided that we were both consenting adults and that the decision to have sex was ours to make. End of story."

"You were constantly hearing things, seeing things. That's not a proper mindset to agree to something like intercourse. Hannibal knew that."

"So now it's Hannibal's fault? Alana, do yourself a favor and stick with a single argument."

"It's both of your faults," she said, aggravated. "You relied on him for mental support, and Hannibal is a highly trained psychiatrist and fully capable of recognizing mental illness. You both should have known better."

"Maybe," Will allowed. "Maybe not. But it doesn't change what happened. Now, I'm sorry Alana but you should go. My ob-gyn should be by soon so she can clear me and BG to go home."

Alana hesitated before she inhaled, readying herself for battle. "About the baby-"

"No," he cut in harshly, the ferocity in the single word startling both the room's occupants.

"Will, with your history, maybe it would be best-"

"Not. One. Word." Will felt dark possessiveness bubbling just below his waning civility and was infuriated that Alana would even attempt to bring the subject up.

It was clear to Will that Alana felt betrayed by both men. She had feelings for them, or had had in Will's case, and it was only salt in the wound for her to realize the real reason Hannibal had broken off their relationship so suddenly, and easily. Alana was a smart woman, she could put two and two together.

Will knew Alana was hurt beyond simple explanations, just as he knew that she was letting that hurt drive her reasoning now. He watched, fists pressed against his thighs and knuckles white from strain, as the female psychiatrist bit her lip in unease before gathering her courage. She straitened her shoulders and met his angry gaze.

"I don't think you're in the right mindset to properly raise a baby, Will."

Will felt a good majority of his control snap and snarled. "Get out."

"Mental instability doesn't just disappear, Will. Especially not after what you've been through. It's best if-"

"GET OUT!" Will bellowed, making Alana jump. He reached over and grabbed his book, lobbing it at her head with scarily accurate precision.

"Just for a little while, Will," she cajoled, ducking the book. "You have to admit that she'd be better off without-"

"What fucking right do you have to come in here and try to take my baby?" he shouted at her.

"Will! Calm down," Alana ordered, dodging as Will hurled another nearby projectile at her.

But Will didn't calm down, instead he grew angrier and words rushed out of his mouth, unfettered. "BG is the first family I've had since my dad died. I won't let you take her away from me because you're angry! Get out. Get out, get out, GET OUT!!!"

"Will-" Alana tried get closer but cried out in pain when the room's cordless phone struck her in the chest.

The door suddenly opened and the floor's various nurses poured into the room, quickly dividing into two groups. The majority of the staff circled Alana, keeping her from disappearing or getting close to their patient, and the remainder flocked around an obviously distressed Will. Will's normal nurse grabbed his hands in an abnormally strong grip and kept him from throwing any more objects.

"She doesn't want me to have BG," he cried, jerking at her hold. "She thinks I'm still crazy!"

"I'm sure this is all a misunderstanding," another nurse assuaged.

"She doesn't think I'm fit." Will's anger morphed into bitter resentment and he felt enraged tears collect in his eyes and his body shudder as he continued to pull at the nurse's hold. "She wants to take BG away!"

Will yelled in frustration before giving up on hurling things at Alana and collected himself enough to jerk his hands from the nurse's grip. He wiped at his face self-consciously, his shoulders still shaking from his rampant emotions. Through unwelcome tears, he saw a few of the nurses glaring in Alana's directions and looking at each other in worry. The floor's head nurse spoke up from where she stood to the empath's left.

"Miss...?" she asked.

Alana straightened from her corner of the room. "Doctor Alana Bloom."

"Doctor Bloom, I'm sure things just got out of hand," the nurse started, "but you're upsetting Mister Graham. Perhaps you should leave and visit another time. Maybe after he and his little one are settled at home?"

For a moment Will thought Alana would take the out the nurse had given her, pretend that everything had been a massive misunderstanding on Will's part, but he saw her eyes flash resolutely and knew that it was a lost cause. Alana's judgement was clouded by both concern and jealousy, and she wouldn't back down until Will had heard her opinion on the matter. Will knew whatever reason or excuse she had would not be good enough and he tensed, ready to begin yelling as soon as she was done.

"I'm not saying you won't ever get her back," Alana said, trying to sound placating even as she ignored the way all the staff in the room stiffened at her words. "It's just that you're still so unbalanced. I don't think you and a baby together unsupervised is a good idea right now. Maybe after you've gotten some help."

"That is quite enough."

Hannibal stood in the doorway, glaring at his ex-lover with tall posture and intimidating gaze. He was in casual clothing, slacks and a long-sleeved sweater over a dress shirt, but it did little to diminish the feeling of barely-restrained menace that radiated from him.

"Hannibal," Alana started uncertainly, clearly startled by the man's suddenly hostile demeanor.

Hannibal cut her off. "I understand that you feel betrayed by my actions, Alana, but what you are doing is not appropriate. It is no way acceptable to try to take someone's child from them out of spite."

Will felt relief flood him at the older man's appearance, knowing that the doctor would take control of the situation. Hannibal would never allow BG to leave the hospital with anyone but Will, not even with her other father. The tension in the empath's body began to fade and his shoulders sagged and fists unclenched.

Alana scowled at Hannibal. "I'm not doing this out of jealousy! Can't you see how unstable his emotions are?"

"Hormonal surges are normal after giving birth, as you well-know." Hannibal glanced around at the multiple strangers before stepping into the room and aside, motioning to the doorway as he did so. "I think it is best if you left now, Alana. You're upsetting Will and it isn't good for him to get worked up this soon after delivery. We'll talk later."

The female psychiatrist narrowed her eyes and put her hands on her hips. "Will needs help, Hannibal. He suffered for months with encephalitis, and the after-effects don't just disappear because he up and has a baby."

The hospital room went deathly silent at Alana's declaration, the staff clearly torn between removing the offending woman and letting things play out, and the new fathers were struck momentarily mute by the veiled hostility behind her words. Hannibal rallied his composure and straightened even further, red eyes narrowing coolly. He worked his jaw once, a blatant sign of anger, before he shook his head at her.

"You're an excellent psychiatrist, Alana, but you're allowing your emotions to control you. It's unbecoming."

"Hannibal-"

"I will admit," Hannibal said, cutting her off, "to leaving you because of Will and the baby. But it was not at his demand. He knew we were in a relationship and made it quite clear that he would do nothing to hurt you.

"I was the one that made the decision to break things off. Because, while I care for you a great deal, my feelings for Will run deeper. I never expected anything to come of Will's and my friendship and so I was content to leave things as they were."

With a wave of his hand, Hannibal motioned towards Will who was sitting wide-eyed and watching. "When I discovered Will's condition, I realized that I had a chance at something I

never thought I would have again. I ended things with you because it was unfair to everyone involved to do otherwise."

Alana stood dumbstruck, her lips slightly ajar, before she jerked back as if struck. She rallied her composure before taking a step forward, the many nurses around her parting to let her through, entranced by the drama unfolding in front of them. She stopped just outside reaching distance and looked up at him, her expression twisting into something that could pass as composure to those that didn't know her. Hannibal closed the remaining distance between them and placed his hands on her shoulders, dragging them down until they rested on her upper arms. He squeezed gently and gave her a sad smile.

"I know I've ruined our friendship, Alana, but I could not in good conscience maintain a relationship with you when I knew a child would only deepen my already significant feelings for Will."

"Hannibal-"

"Stop punishing Will," Hannibal murmured, preventing Alana from gaining control, "for something that isn't his fault. Threatening to take Gabija will do you no good, especially when you would be trying to take her from me as well."

Alana seemed to realize the major misstep she made because she backtracked quickly, looking around the room at the various nursing staff, "I would never..."

"You already have," the doctor said. "Because the only way to prevent interaction between Will and his child is to revoke custody from both parents. Anyone who knows me knows that I would never keep Will from his daughter, and I would never sit by and allow someone to simply sweep in and steal my family from me."

Hannibal squeezed her arms once more before letting go and stepping back. He motioned towards the door again. "You have the right to be angry, but you need to leave now. You're upsetting Will and I would hate it if I couldn't take him home today because he was too worked up."

It was a clear dismissal, one that everyone in the room understood, and the nurse in charge jerked her head to the employees behind Alana. They shuffled her through the door before she could begin to argue and closed it behind them, shutting the two men and the remaining nursing staff off from the rest of the hospital.

The empath shook himself and rubbed his arms, as if to comfort himself. "Hannibal?"

Hannibal responded perfectly to the wavering emotions in Will's voice, crossing the room to slip between the women surrounding the bed like a breeze through a curtain. The staff backed away, giving the men space and Hannibal took advantage of it by sitting on the edge of the bed. He gently carded his hand through Will's curls and gave the empath a reassuring smile.

"Everything will be fine Will. Alana is merely upset right now. She'll calm down and realize it's me she's angry with and not you."

"But what if she tries to take BG?" Will asked the older man.

Hannibal's fingers, hidden in Will's locks, twitched, and it told Will all he needed to know about the other's reaction to such an attack by Alana.

"Even if she places a complaint with child services, nothing will come of it. She has never been your psychiatrist and hasn't interacted with you in almost a year. There's no grounds to proclaim you incompetent and a danger to Gabija. A simple interview with a psychologist will disprove her claims."

Will bit his lip in thought before nodding. He glanced at the staff around him and gave them an apologetic smile. "I'm sorry for the disturbance."

The head nurse shook her head. "None of that now, you have nothing to apologize for. I'd be upset too." She brushed a few wrinkles out of her scrubs and glanced at Hannibal. "I'll track down your doctor."

The remaining nurses left, and Hannibal and Will were alone. Will waited for the 'snick' of the door closing before he let out a shaky sigh and rubbed his eyes, still worked up from the confrontation. He pressed his fingers against his temples, trying to stem the forming headache, and grimaced.

"That went well," he lamented.

Hannibal gently knocked Will's fingers away from his skull instead of replying, replacing them with his own and rubbing with a gentle pressure aimed to ease the tension building. He only spoke after Will was relaxed against him, pain-free, but even then it was sparingly.

"Nothing will happen."

While it was vague, it was calming to hear the certainty in the other's voice. Will pulled away and gave Hannibal a small upwards flick of his lips before his brows furrowed. A flash of panic coursed through him when he realized what was missing.

"Where's BG?"

"She's with a nurse that stayed at the front station. I thought it best to keep Gabija out of the room until things settled down."

The empath sighed again and ran a hand over his face. "I knew she'd be angry but I didn't think she'd go so far."

Hannibal hummed once and took the seat next to the bed, watching Will for a full minute or so in silence. Eventually, he spoke. "You know as well as I that any attempt made by Alana will only be shut down. You have several people in your corner, myself included, that will take great exception to her meddling."

Will looked over to Hannibal and observed him. "Be careful, Hannibal. That can be taken as a threat out of context."

Hannibal seemed to understand the veiled cautioning against violence because he tipped his head and quirked his thin lips. "I still consider Alana a friend. But, while she has been wronged and is allowed to be upset about it, I am just as able to lodge a complaint as she. She forgets that I have friends among the licensing board as well."

With Will's concern for Alana's possible disappearance abated, his worry about BG's absence returned. He ordered she be brought to him and Hannibal went without complaint, a smile tugging at his lips as he did Will's bidding. Will watched him go and tipped his head back, resting his hands over his abdomen as he thought.

Will hoped that Alana would leave things be. While he still cared for her, regardless of the recent confrontation, when it came down to it there would be no hesitation on Will's part in allowing his protectors their pound of flesh. Celeste would happily ruin Alana's career if the psychiatrist tried to take BG from Will, and there was absolutely no need to contemplate what Hannibal would do the first chance he could.

The hospital door opened and Will smiled as Hannibal entered with Gabija, the small purple bundle morphing as the baby wriggled her arms in the swaddling the nurses had dressed her in. Hannibal crossed over to the bed and gently handed BG to Will, sliding the infant into her younger father's arms. Will cradled her against his chest and allowed the last dregs of his panic and anger go, breathing in the calm his daughter projected. Unfocused maroon eyes looked up at him and Will suddenly knew, without a shadow of a doubt, what he was.

A fisher.

Will had effectively chummed the water and, somehow, reeled in not one but several prized fish. He had caught himself an entire monster family, netted and tamed. They were circling him, waiting for, even daring, a foolish creature to get too close so they could rip it to shreds.

All for him.

Hannibal's long elegant fingers petted BG's soft dark hair, the same color and curl of Will's, a warm smile stretching his lips as he did so. The knowledge that Will had a family now, people that belonged to him by blood and by choice, warmed Will's entire core and he reached for the other man's hand. Fingers touched and then slid against each other as Hannibal linked their hands together and lifted them to his lips. He placed a kiss to Will's knuckles and smiled at Will, affection and even a bit of reverence filling his gaze.

"Thank you, Will," Hannibal said.

Will squeezed the hand he held before tugging on it, motioning for Hannibal to sit on the side of the bed. As he lowered himself down onto the mattress, Hannibal's eyes flitted over the empath and the baby, as if trying to memorize and file the image of Will and BG away. It was entirely possible that the doctor was creating a new room in his memory palace, or reopening a long sealed one, one devoted to the most precious of things.

"Hannibal," Will murmured after a full minute of intense scrutiny, not wanting to break the older man's concentration.

"Hm?" Hannibal focused his attention fully on Will.

"Is it new or old, the room you're filling?"

Lips quirked into a pleasantly surprised expression before Hannibal caressed Gabija's small hand. "New, right beside the old one. A new room for a new chapter. Both are precious to me, but it's not right to allow them to mingle. I have no desire to taint what I have now with the past."

"Good," Will said. "Because I want to make sure you have enough room for everything that I want to be there."

Hannibal's head tilted in contemplation before he realized exactly what the other male meant. He sighed but nodded, calm acceptance radiating from his posture. A large hand cupped Will's cheek as equally gently as it had BG, and Hannibal leaned forward to place a kiss on the younger man's forehead.

"I meant what I promised you," he whispered, his cheek moving to press against Will's. "I will never harm our family, not even if you deliver me to the FBI on a platter. Our children will never have reason to fear me, you will never have to doubt me."

The doctor pulled back and smirked at Will. "Celeste will never have to kill me."

Will weighed Hannibal's sincerity before nodding once, acceptance of the man's promise. He glanced down and smiled at the infant in his arms. A tiny hand worked its way out of the blanket trapping it and Will slipped his pointer finger into the baby's grasp, his throat working to swallow back tears when Gabija squeezed it.

"Will?" Hannibal asked, picking up on Will's struggle for composure.

He glanced up at Hannibal and his watery smile widened. "I'm happy," he said simply.

"Sometimes," Hannibal said, "that's a gift unto itself."

Will nodded, looking down at BG and waving her little fist. "Where's Abigail?"

"Home." Hannibal continued at the empath's look. "Your home. After what I've done, I think it would be best if both our daughters reside with you. Abigail is understandably wary of me and I don't have the ability to heal that particular damage."

"She'll be fine, Hannibal, she's a survivor. Celeste will take her under her wing and teach her what she needs to know." Will glanced at the killer sitting beside him. "I'm just glad she's safe."

Hannibal nodded. "And she will stay that way, I swear to you."

"I know," Will nodded again. "Because if you try to hurt any of us, I'll gut you, Hannibal. Don't think I won't."

"I wouldn't dare."

"I mean it," Will said with complete frankness. "I won't let you take my family from me, not even yourself."

Will clarified at Hannibal's puzzled look.

"You're mine, Hannibal. I won't let you do something stupid that ends with you in custody, or dead. I simply won't stand for it."

A dark look flashed in Hannibal's eyes and the killer rose to the surface momentarily. "Do you think you could stop me, William?"

"Yes."

It wasn't a bluff or boast on Will's part, the empath was confident he could curb Hannibal's need for an audience - the thing most likely to get him caught - and nip any self-destructive acts in the bud before they impacted the family. Hannibal seemed to realize that as well because the chilly expression faded and was replaced with something wicked and possessive.

"Truly beautiful," the man muttered as he stroked Will's face. "And you're all mine."

"And you're mine," Will reminded the other.

Hannibal nodded. "Yes, of course. Yours."

BG yawned suddenly, her mouth stretching wide, and both her fathers looked down at her with a little bit of awe, amazed that something so innocent and beautiful came from two people full of so much darkness. It made Will proud and happy, and so many other things that he couldn't begin to name them. BG was theirs, his, a compilation of everything that was perhaps not good but definitely right with both he and Hannibal.

He wasn't naive enough to believe Braelyn would remain completely innocent, Hannibal was her other father after all, but she would grow up to be both everything and nothing like her parents.

Abigail as well.

Both his girls would be happy and loved and cared for. Will would make sure they had a place in this world that befitted them, even if he had to carve it out himself. Abigail would learn to thrive, not simply survive. The teenager who had killed with her father to keep her family together would learn at Will's and Celeste's feet, not Hannibal's. Will would protect her this time. He'd do right by her. Hannibal would as well.

As if reading his thoughts, Hannibal laid a hand on BG's scalp and another on Will's hand before he caught the younger man's gaze.

"Ours," he said, meaning the entirety of their new family.

Will nodded. "Ours."

It was as simple as that.

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